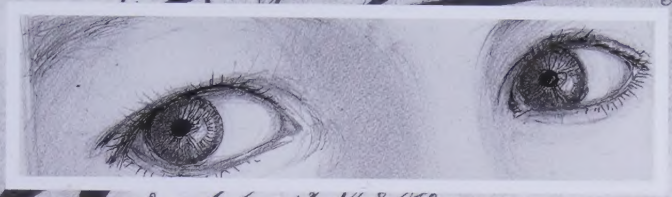


DARKROOM

a memoir in black & white

LILA QUINTERO WEAVER

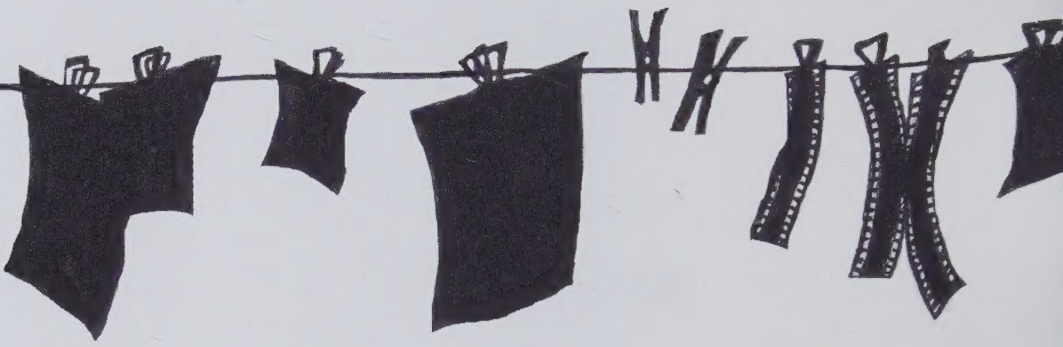
$24.95

Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White is an arresting and moving personal story about childhood, race, and identity in the American South, rendered in stunning illustrations by the author, Lila Quintero Weaver.

In 1961, when Lila was five, she and her family emigrated from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Marion, Alabama, in the heart of Alabama's Black Belt. As educated, middle-class Latino immigrants in a region that was defined by segregation, the Quinteros occupied a privileged vantage from which to view the racially charged culture they inhabited. Weaver and her family were firsthand witnesses to key moments in the civil rights movement.

But *Darkroom* is her personal story as well: chronicling what it was like being a Latina girl in the Jim Crow South, trying to understand both a foreign country and the horrors of our nation's race relations. Neither black nor white, Weaver observed very early on these inequalities in American culture, with its blonde and blue-eyed feminine ideal. *Darkroom* is the story of her search for her place in society and her struggle against the discrimination surrounding her.

DARKROOM



The University of Alabama Press • Tuscaloosa, Alabama

DARKROOM

a memoir in black and white

LILA QUINTERO WEAVER

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The views expressed in this book are not necessarily shared by my siblings or other persons that witnessed or experienced the events recounted.

In memory of
Mama & Daddy,
whose gifts are without number.

To Paul,
who keeps on giving,
and to
Jude, Benjamin, & Caitlin,
who've inherited these collective
treasures.

I love you all.

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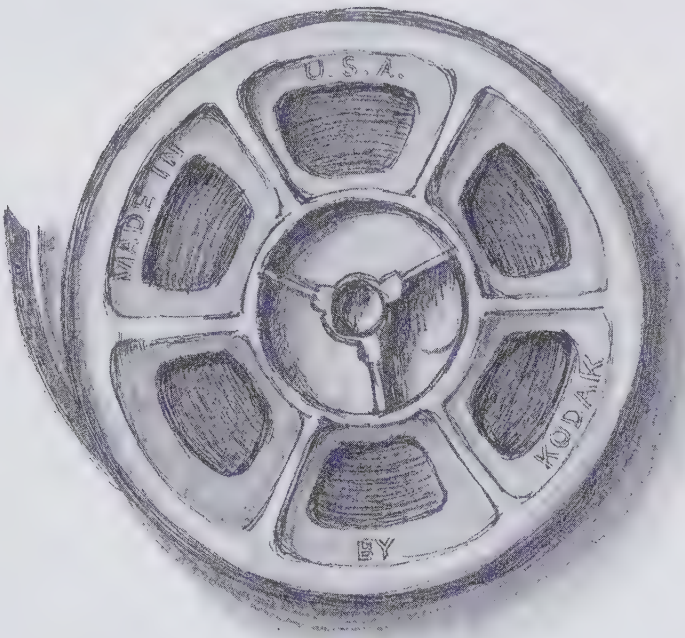
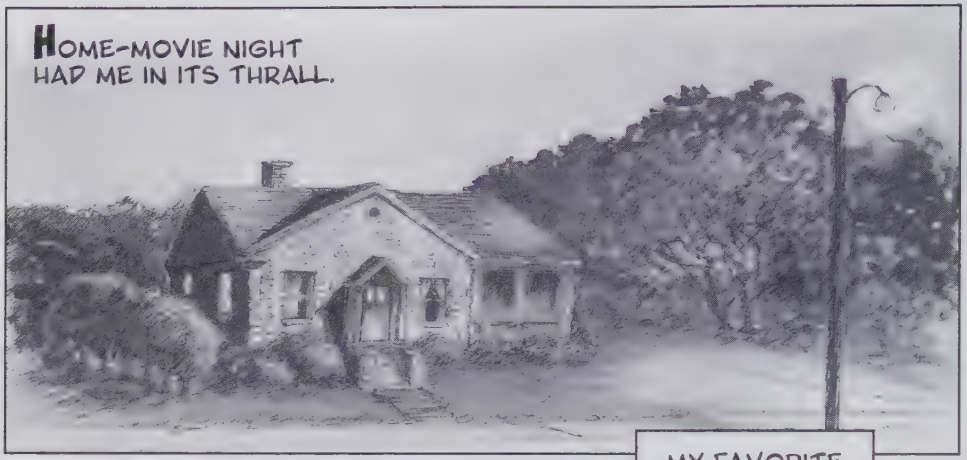
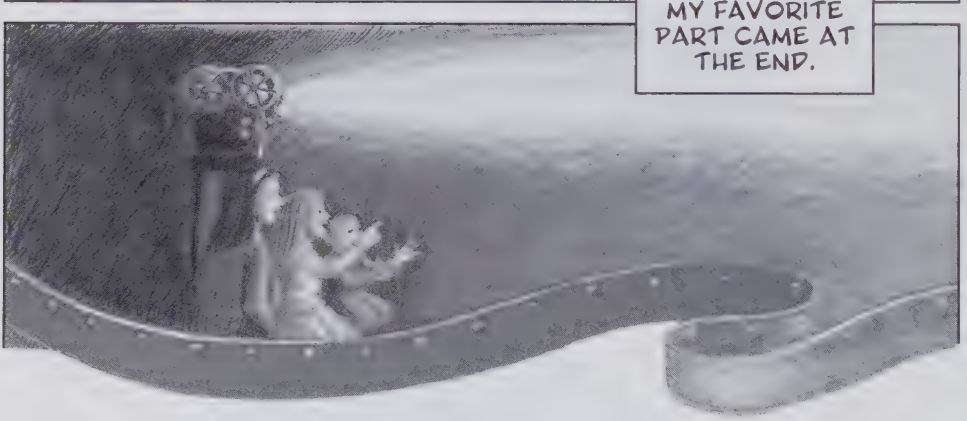
DARKROOM

Prologue

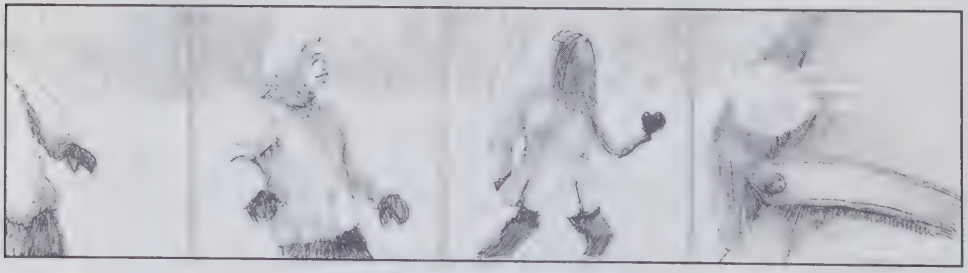
HOME MOVIES



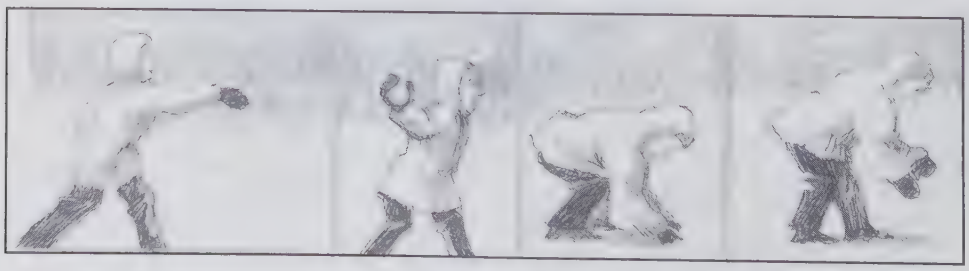




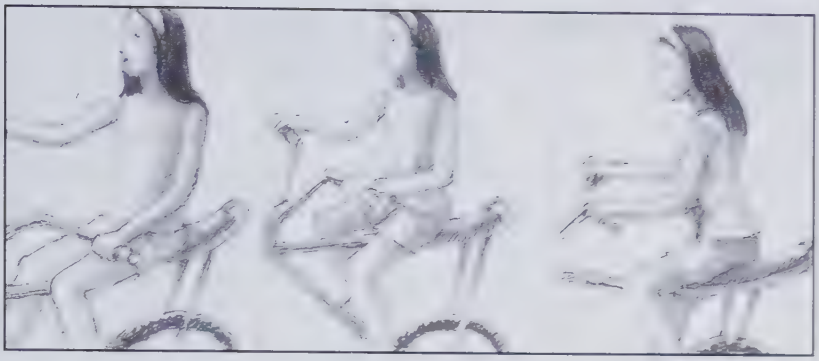
AT THAT POINT, DADDY REWOUND
THE FILM, AND WE SAW IT ALL IN REVERSE.



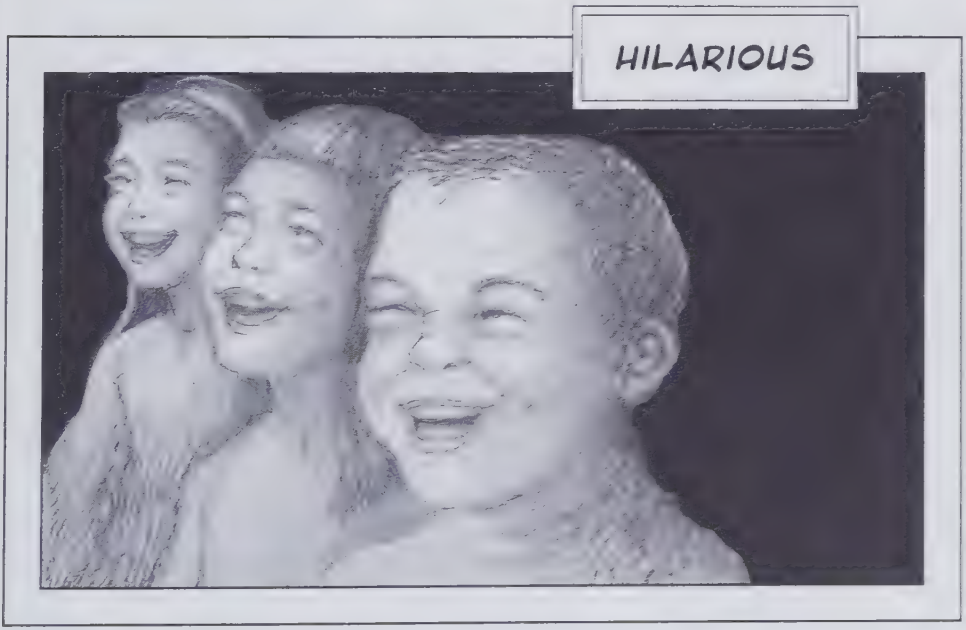
THE BACKWARDS FLIGHT OF A SNOWBALL



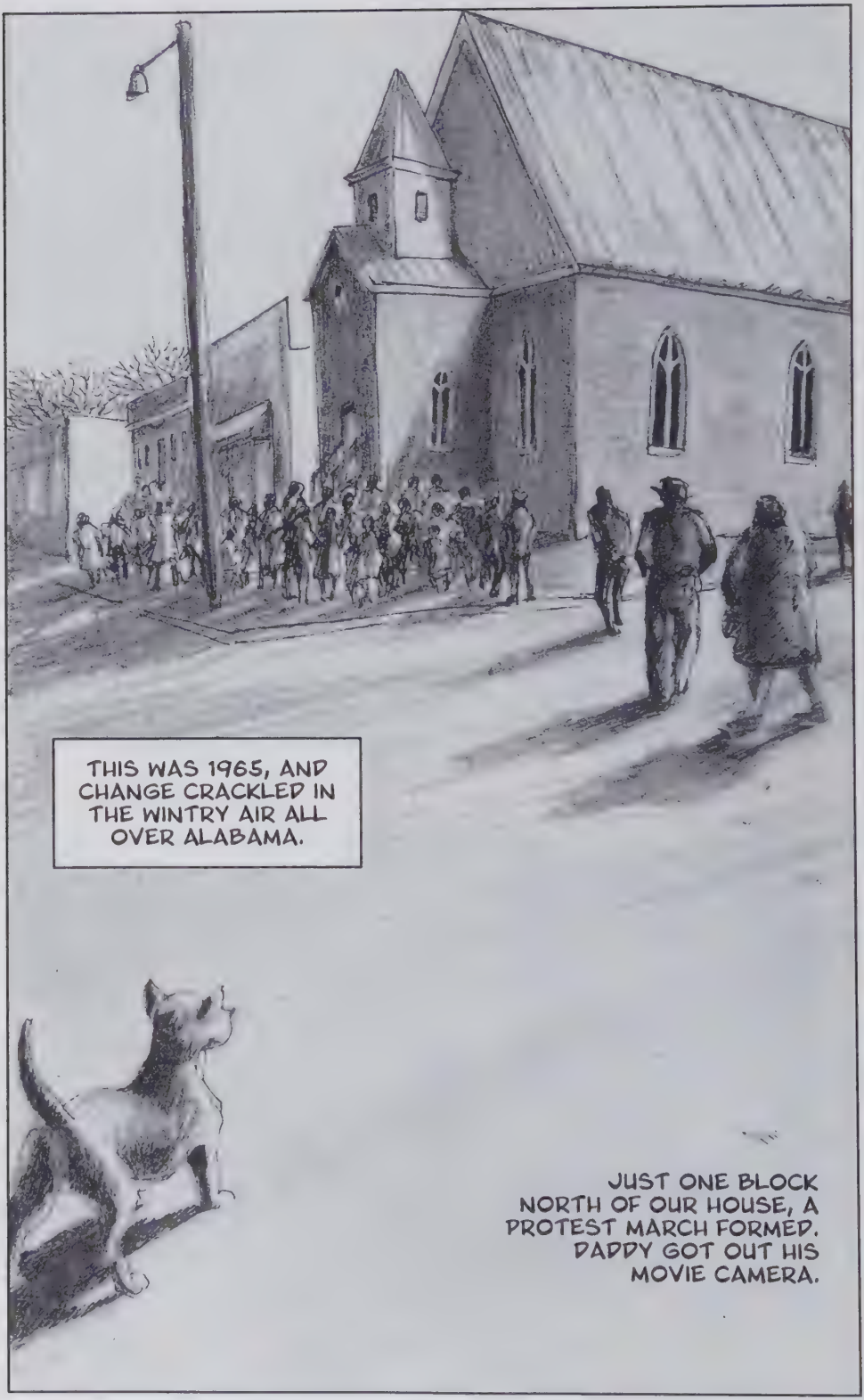
THE BACKWARDS
PEDALING OF A BIKE

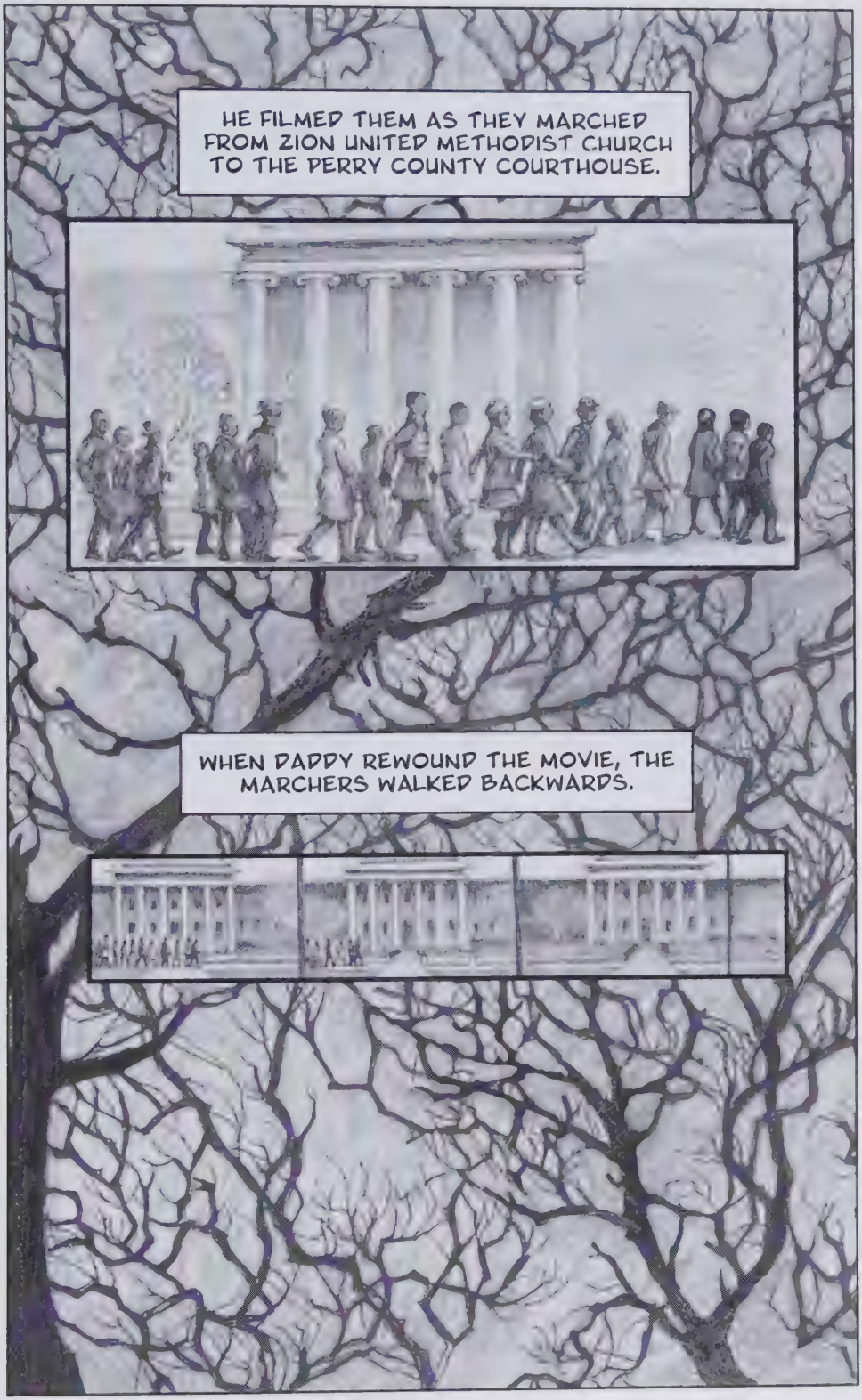


THE BACKWARDS
DIGGING OF A HOLE.



BUT NOT EVERYTHING TICKLED OUR FUNNY BONES.

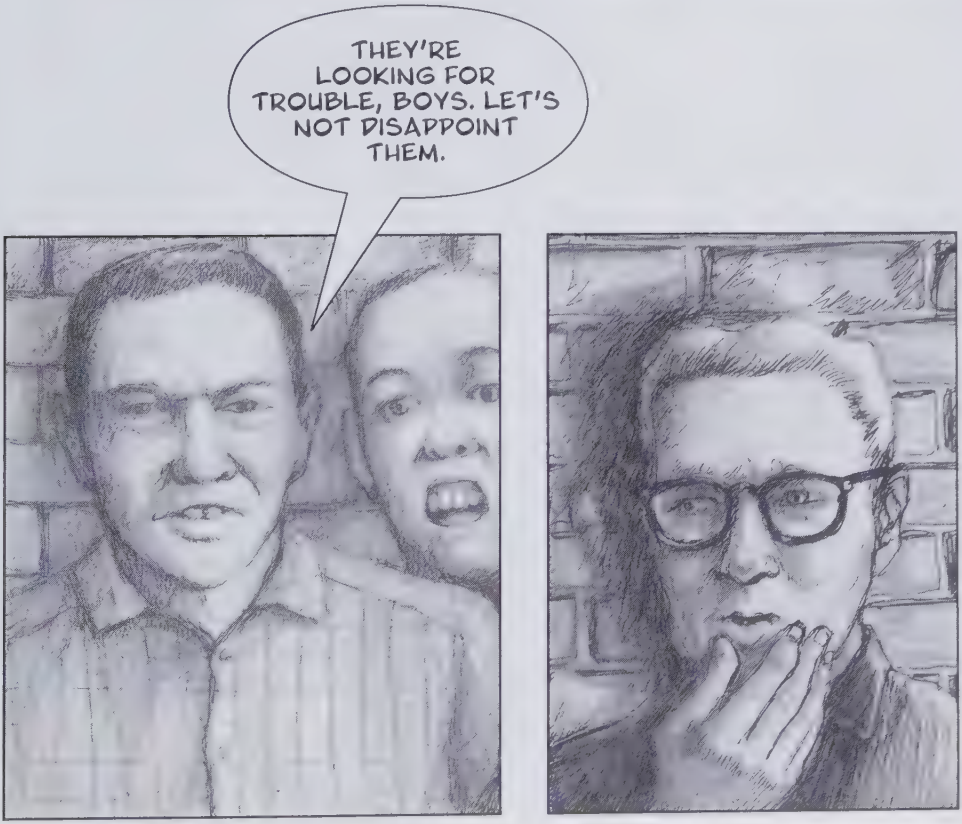

THIS WAS 1965, AND CHANGE CRACKLED IN THE WINTRY AIR ALL OVER ALABAMA.
JUST ONE BLOCK NORTH OF OUR HOUSE, A PROTEST MARCH FORMED. DADDY GOT OUT HIS MOVIE CAMERA.


HE FILMED THEM AS THEY MARCHED FROM ZION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH TO THE PERRY COUNTY COURTHOUSE.
WHEN DADDY REWOUND THE MOVIE, THE MARCHERS WALKED BACKWARDS.

IT WAS FUNNY. HOW COULD ANYBODY KNOW WHERE THEY WERE GOING WITHOUT EVER LOOKING BACK? BUT THEY WALKED WITH SUCH APLOMB, AND THAT'S WHAT KILLED US.

THE MARCH TOOK THEM AROUND THE COURTHOUSE I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY TIMES.

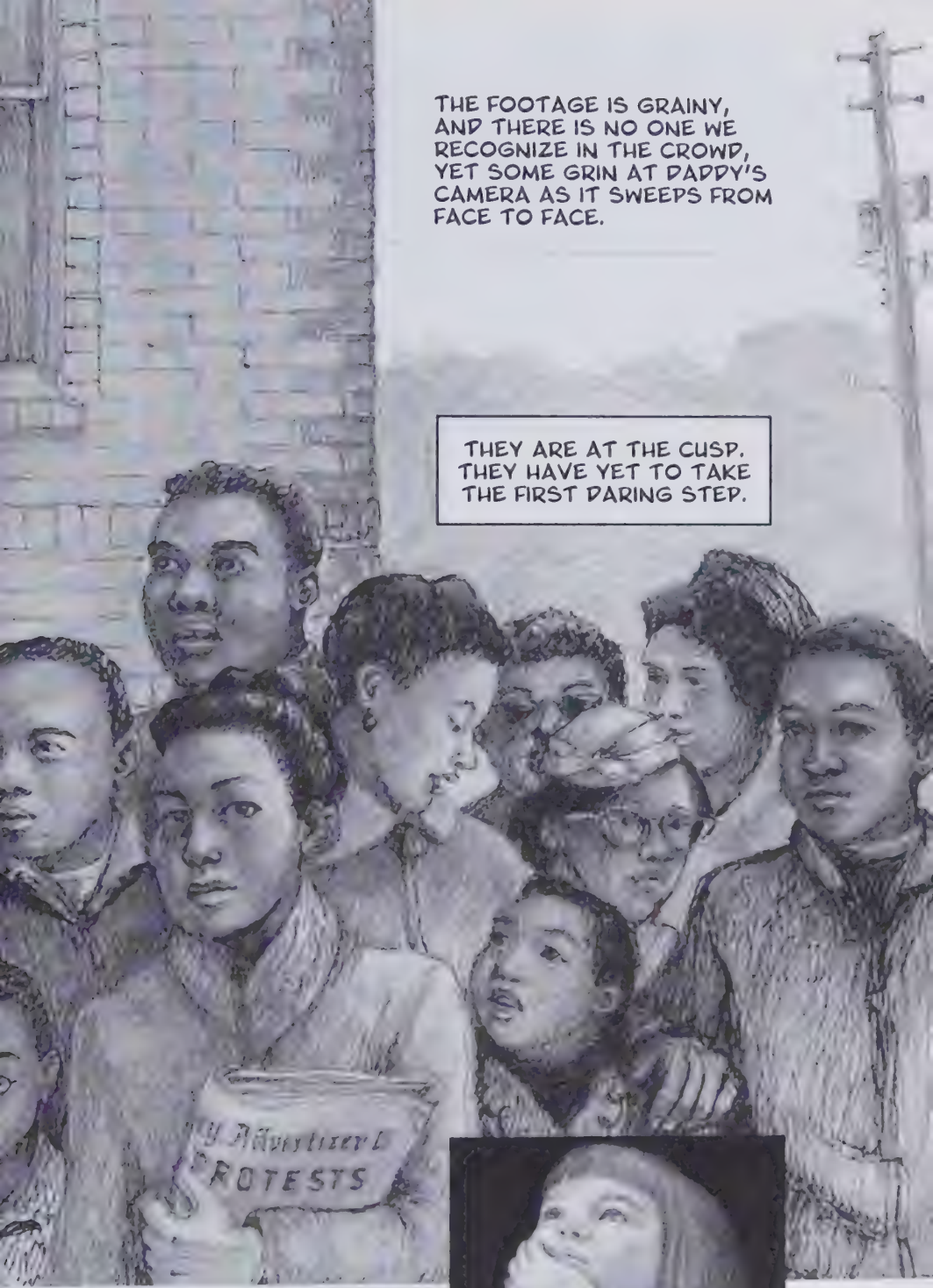
THE MOVIE DOESN'T SHOW HOW WHITE PEOPLE REACTED. BUT HAVING LIVED AMONG THEM, I CAN MAKE AN EDUCATED GUESS.



IN REVERSE, THE FILM RETURNS THE MARCHERS TO THE CHURCH'S FRONT DOOR.

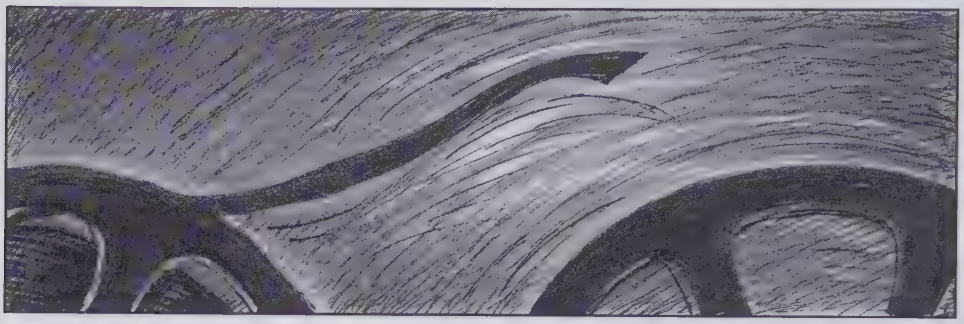
THE FOOTAGE IS GRAINY, AND THERE IS NO ONE WE RECOGNIZE IN THE CROWD, YET SOME GRIN AT DADDY'S CAMERA AS IT SWEEPS FROM FACE TO FACE.

THEY ARE AT THE CUSP. THEY HAVE YET TO TAKE THE FIRST DARING STEP.

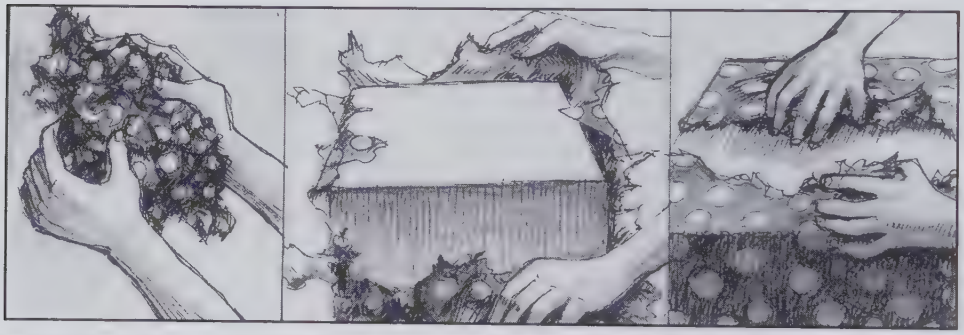


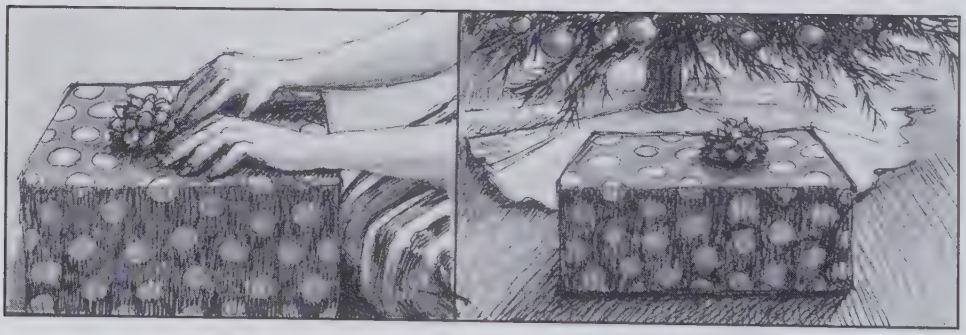
I HAD BUT THE DIMMEST COMPREHENSION OF THEIR CAUSE.

A SCENE OR TWO MORE, THEN WITH A *FLAP, FLAP, FLAP*, THE TAKE-UP REEL TURNS LOOSE THE FINAL BIT OF FILM.

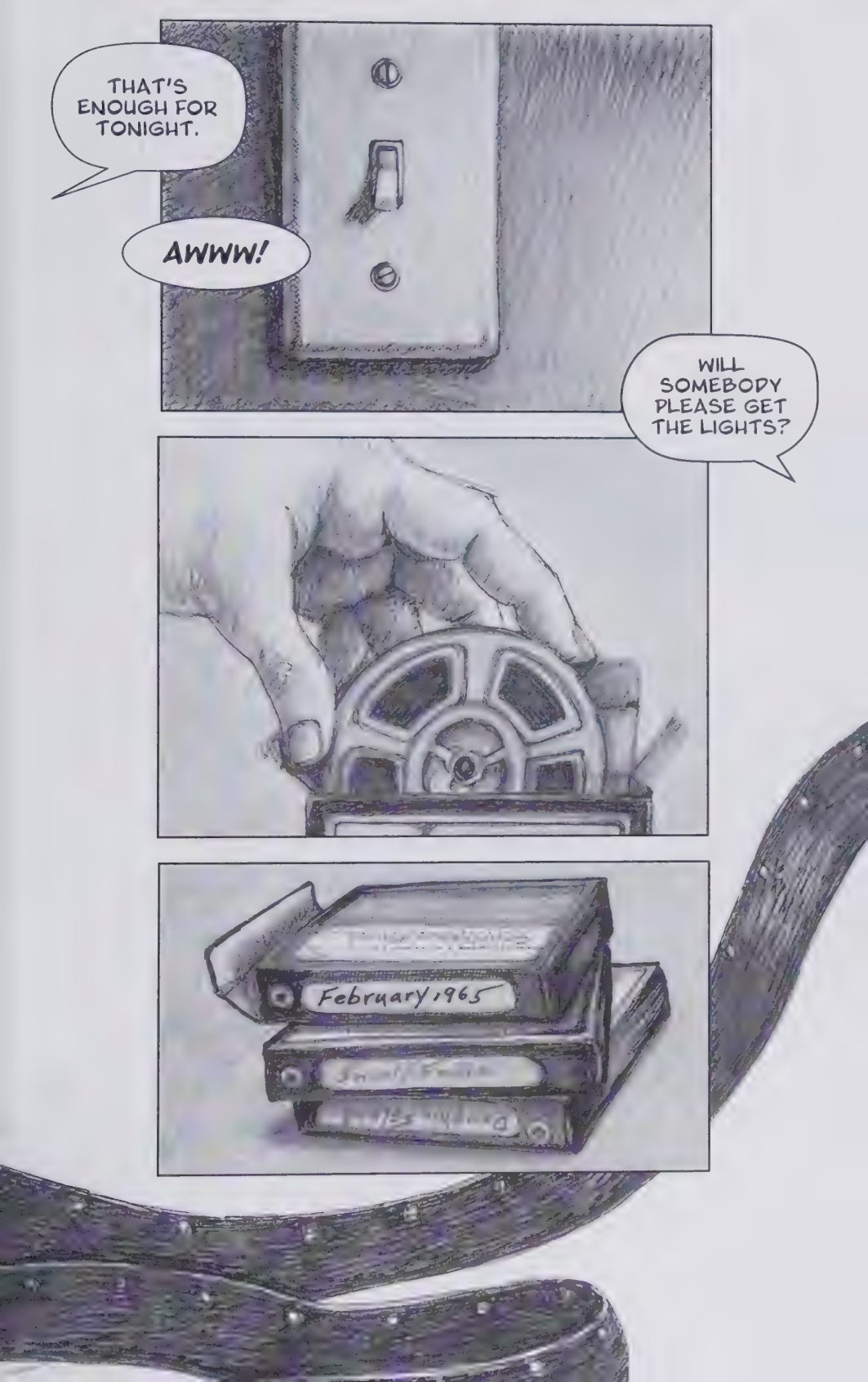


AND LIKE THE BACKWARDS UNWRAPPING OF A GIFT,



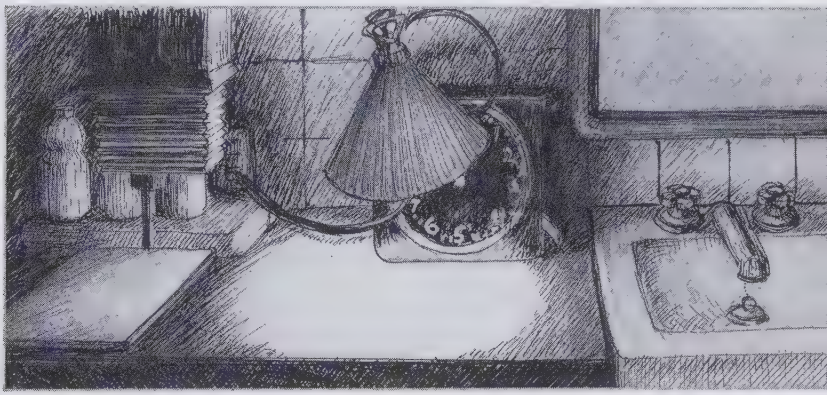


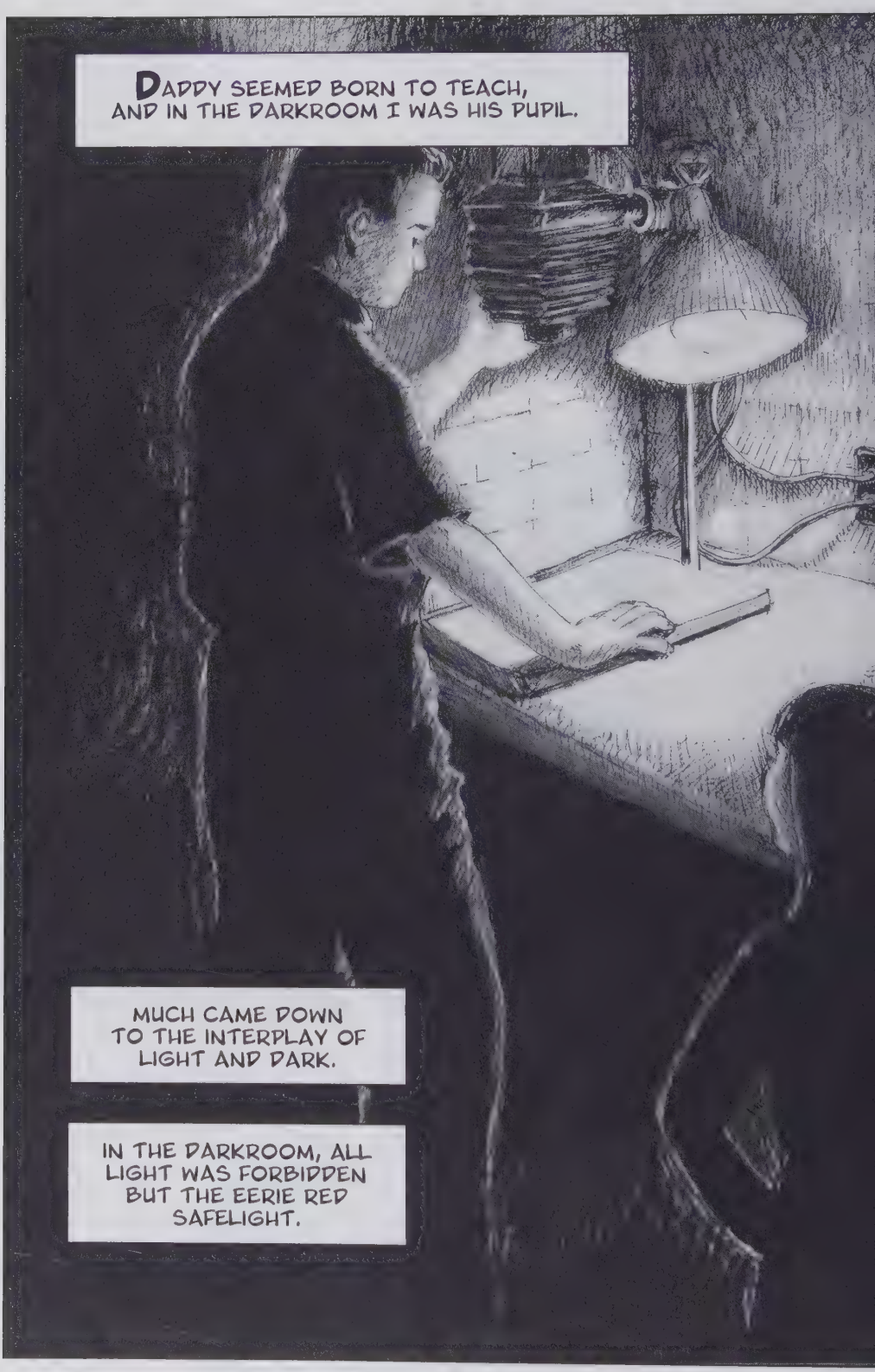
EVERYTHING RETURNS TO ITS NEAT BEGINNING.


THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TONIGHT.
AWWW!
WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE GET THE LIGHTS?
February 1965

chapter 1

IN THE DARK

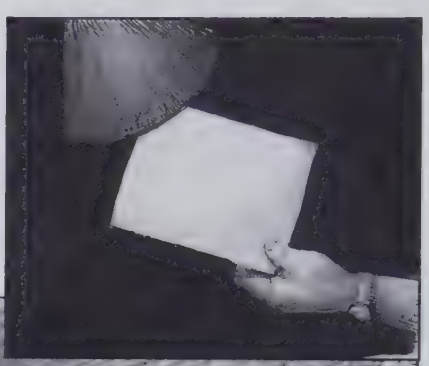



DADDY SEEMED BORN TO TEACH, AND IN THE DARKROOM I WAS HIS PUPIL.
MUCH CAME DOWN TO THE INTERPLAY OF LIGHT AND DARK.
IN THE DARKROOM, ALL LIGHT WAS FORBIDDEN BUT THE EERIE RED SAFELIGHT.

ONCE DEVELOPED, THE NEGATIVES WERE READY FOR THE ENLARGER.
CLEAR PATCHES IN THE NEGATIVES LET A BLAZE OF LIGHT PASS THROUGH,
INVISIBLY TRANSFER-RING THE IMAGE ONTO THE PAPER.

MOST OF THE DARKROOM LESSONS HAVE FADED AWAY.

BUT HOW COULD I FORGET THE ACTUAL MOMENT OF REVELATION?

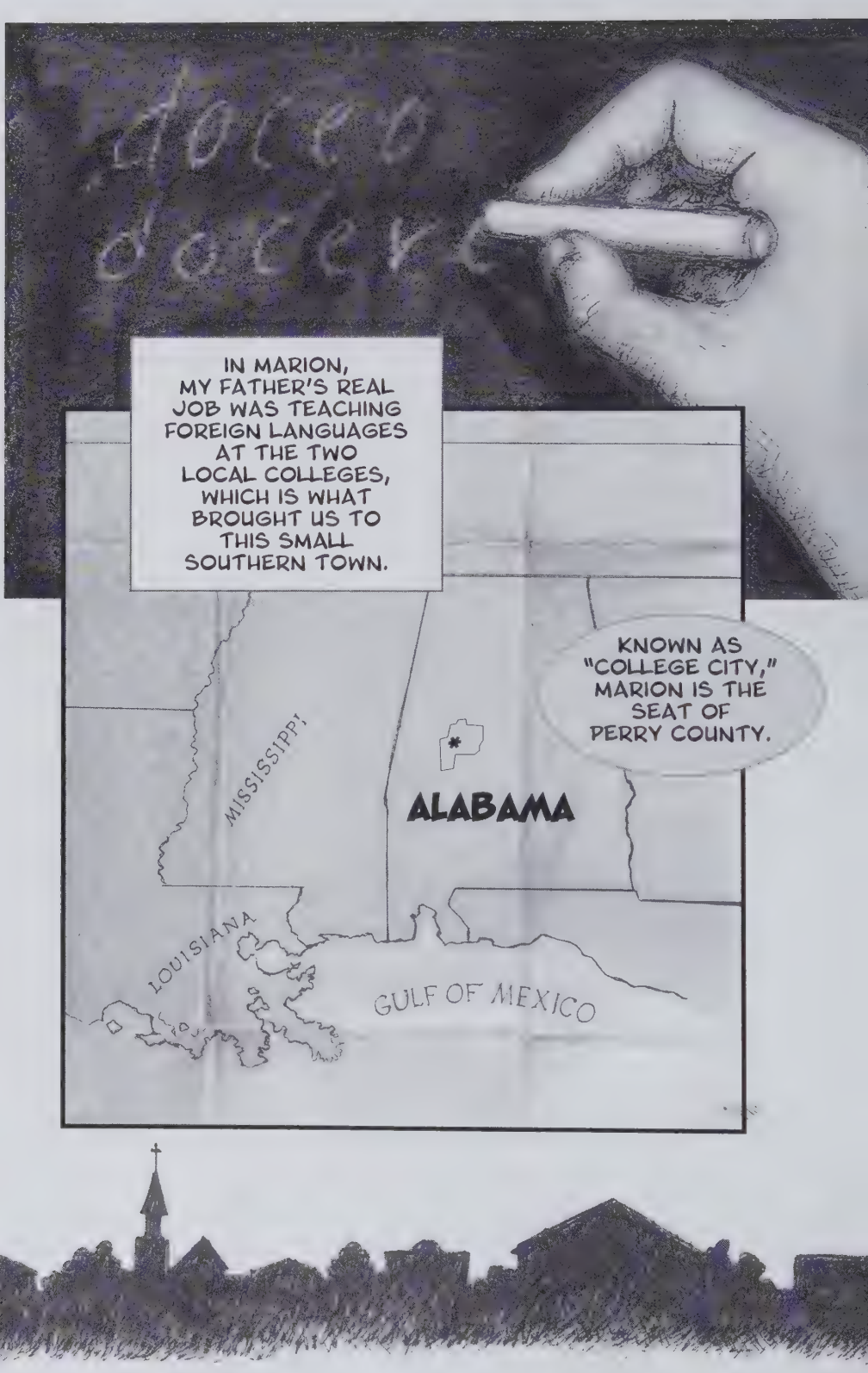


WHEN THE BLANK SHEET OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PAPER...

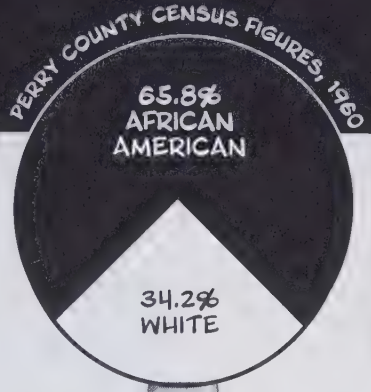
SLIPPED INTO THE DEVELOPING BATH...

...AND BEFORE MY EYES THE LATENT IMAGE FLOWERED.

WITHIN SECONDS, THE FULL TONAL RANGE DEVELOPED, PUNCTUATED BY AREAS OF BLACK AND WHITE.


IN MARION, MY FATHER'S REAL JOB WAS TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT THE TWO LOCAL COLLEGES, WHICH IS WHAT BROUGHT US TO THIS SMALL SOUTHERN TOWN.
KNOWN AS "COLLEGE CITY," MARION IS THE SEAT OF PERRY COUNTY.
MISSISSIPPI
ALABAMA
LOUISIANA
GULF OF MEXICO

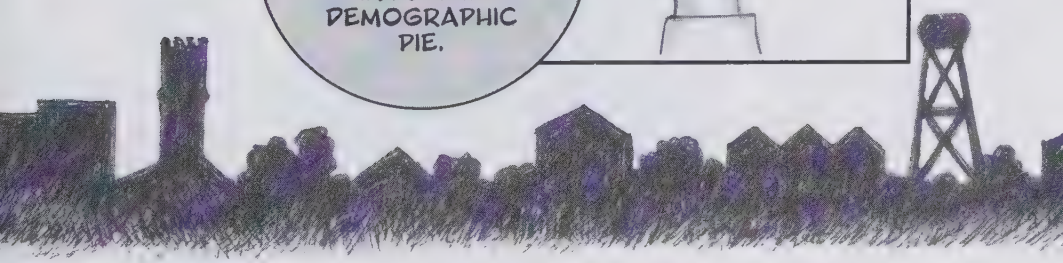
IT SITS ON THE NORTHERN EDGE OF THE BLACK BELT REGION, NAMED FOR ITS FERTILE DARK-CLAY SOIL WHERE ONCE UPON A TIME COTTON REIGNED AS KING AND SLAVE-HOLDING PLANTATIONS COMPOSED THE STATE'S ECONOMIC CORE.



IN *1961*, MARION WAS A CHARMING TOWN OF 3,200, NEATLY DIVIDED BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE.

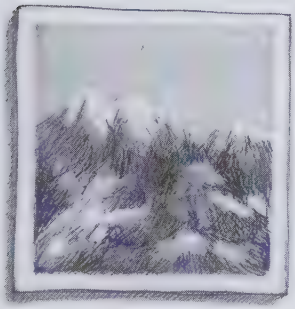
UNTIL WE ARRIVED.

WE INTRODUCED A SLIVER OF GRAY INTO THE DEMOGRAPHIC PIE.



IN OUR TINY ALABAMA TOWN, DADDY TRAINED HIS LENSES ON MANY AN IMPORTANT EVENT.

UP TO 1961, WHEN MY WHOLE FAMILY CAME TO AMERICA, MY FATHER'S LIFE CAN BE SUMMARIZED IN A SERIES OF SNAPSHOTS:

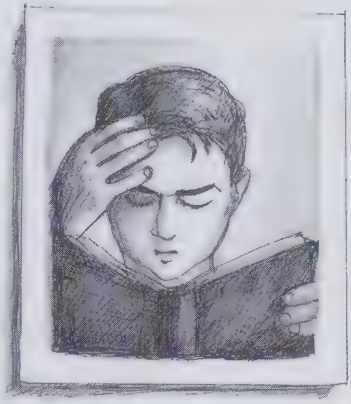


BORN IN ARGENTINA AT THE FOOT OF THE ANDES

ORPHANED AT AGE NINE

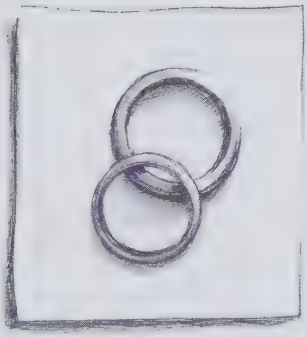
LEFT HOMELESS ALONG WITH HIS BROTHER

RESCUED BY AMERICAN MISSIONARIES

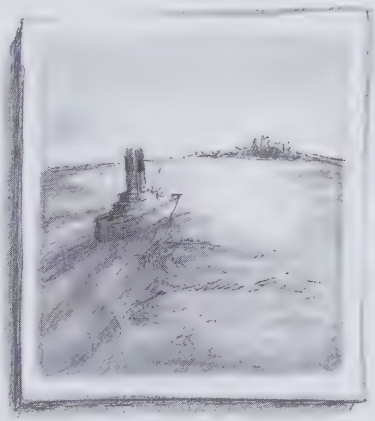


TAUGHT HIMSELF TO READ

CALLED TO PREACH



WED TO MY MOTHER

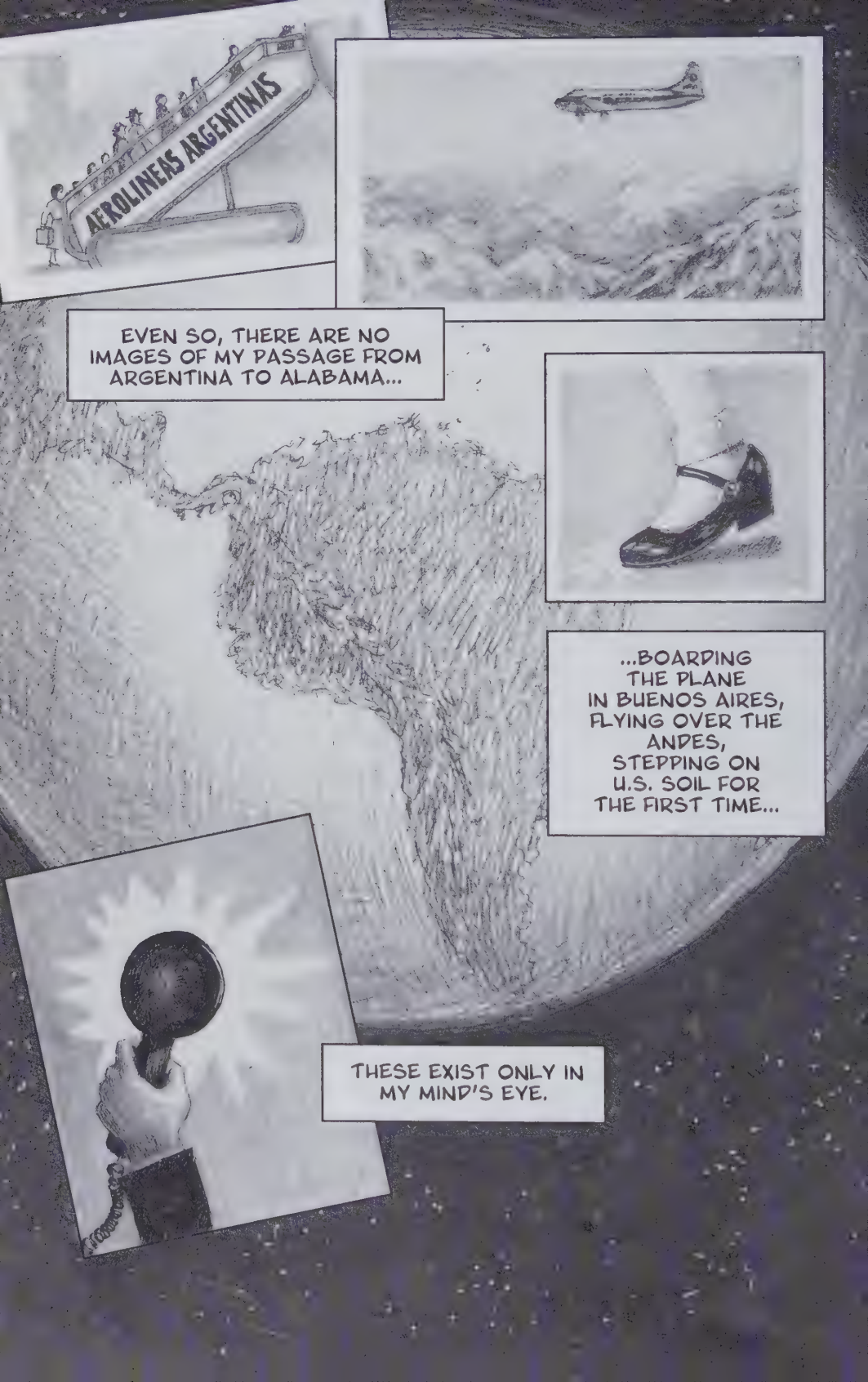


IMMIGRATED TO AMERICA

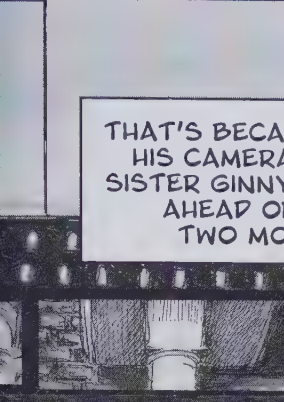
ACQUIRED THE FIRST OF MANY CAMERAS DESTINED TO RECORD MUCH OF OUR LIVES

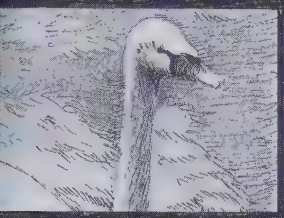
ARGENTINA Vintage
Family Photos
Negatives
Miscellaneo
EVERY HOUSE WE EVER LIVED IN HAD A MAKESHIFT DARKROOM.
PHOTOS ARGENTINA Pre 1961
PHOTOS U.S.A. 1961 →
MORE PHOTOS
CONSEQUENTLY, WE WERE OVERRUN WITH PHOTOS.

THE CAMERA DIDN'T MISS MUCH.

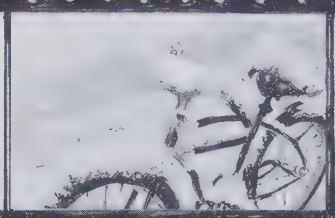

AEROLINEAS ARGENTINAS
EVEN SO, THERE ARE NO IMAGES OF MY PASSAGE FROM ARGENTINA TO ALABAMA...
...BOARDING THE PLANE IN BUENOS AIRES, FLYING OVER THE ANDES, STEPPING ON U.S. SOIL FOR THE FIRST TIME...
THESE EXIST ONLY IN MY MIND'S EYE.

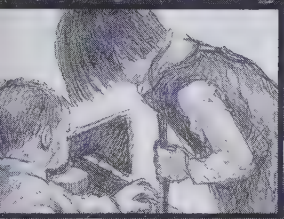
THAT'S BECAUSE DADDY, HIS CAMERA, AND MY SISTER GINNY HAD GONE AHEAD OF US BY TWO MONTHS.





MY IMMIGRATION ISN'T THE ONLY GAP IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD.





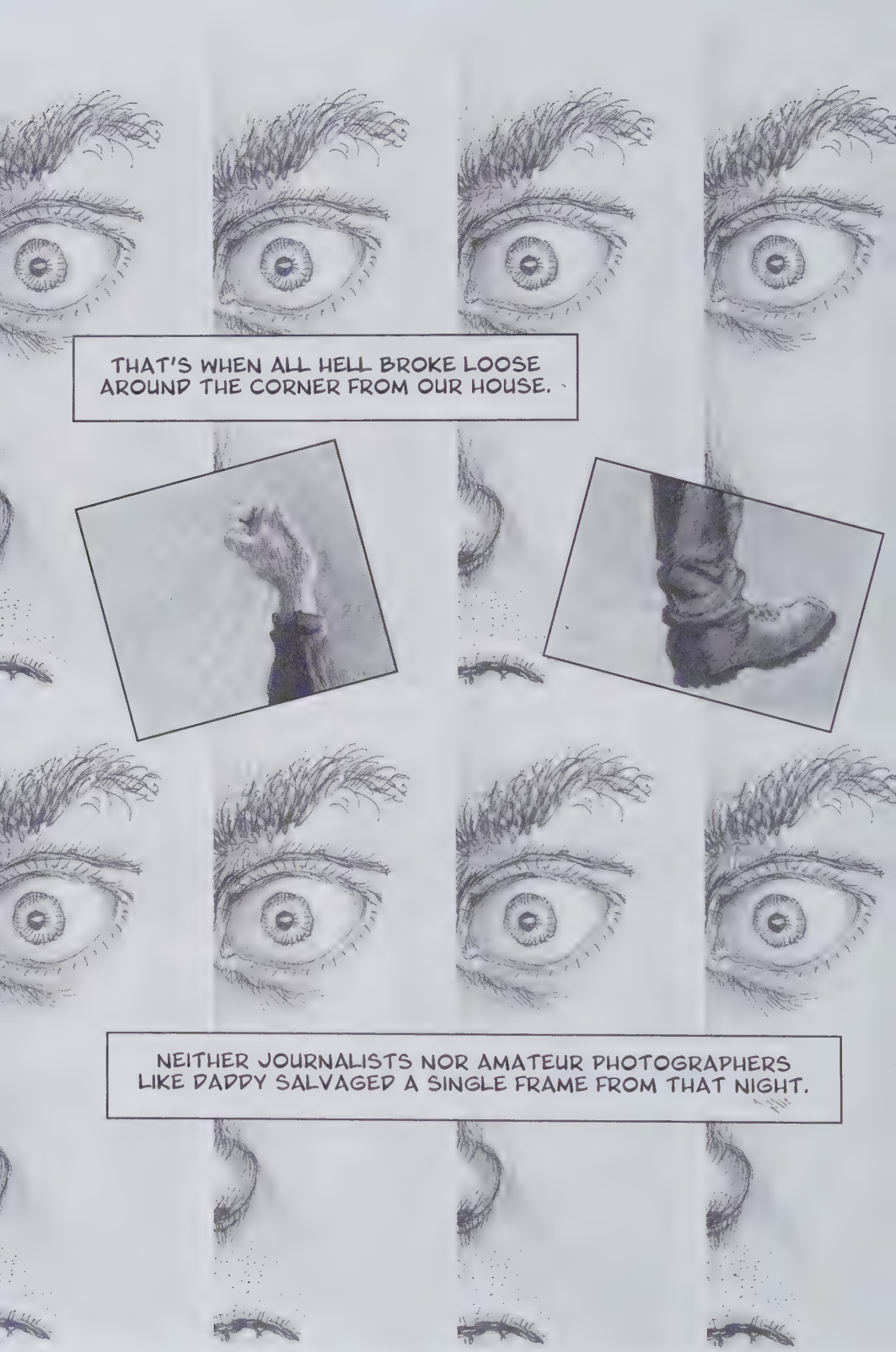
GINNY'S ELOPEMENT SLIPPED BY UNPHOTOGRAPHED.

SO DID MOMENTS I HID FROM MY PARENTS, LIKE SCHOOL PLAYS AND SPELLING BEES.

OF COURSE, NOBODY AT ALL GOT A SHOT

OF WHAT HAPPENED JUST ONE BLOCK FROM OUR HOUSE ON FEBRUARY 18, 1965.

OUR CLOSEST BRUSH WITH HISTORY.


THAT'S WHEN ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE AROUND THE CORNER FROM OUR HOUSE.
NEITHER JOURNALISTS NOR AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHERS LIKE DADDY SALVAGED A SINGLE FRAME FROM THAT NIGHT.

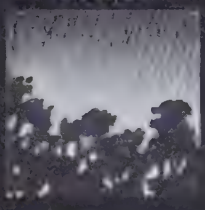
MAYHEM RULED.
NO STREETLIGHTS, NO FLASHBULBS.
CAMERAS SMASHED, FILM EXPOSED.
IT WAS MARION'S DARKEST HOUR.

NOW AND THEN IMAGES FROM THOSE YEARS COME INTO ALIGNMENT, AND I SEE SOMETHING....

HOW ALL THE PIECES FIT TOGETHER.

LEAVING ARGENTINA

ENTERING AN UNKNOWN WORLD



LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO CALL HOME

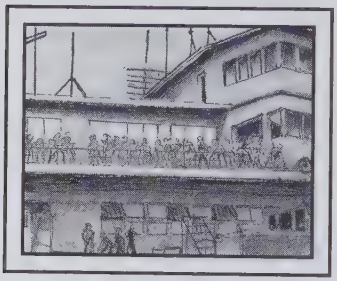
AND A PEOPLE OF MY OWN....

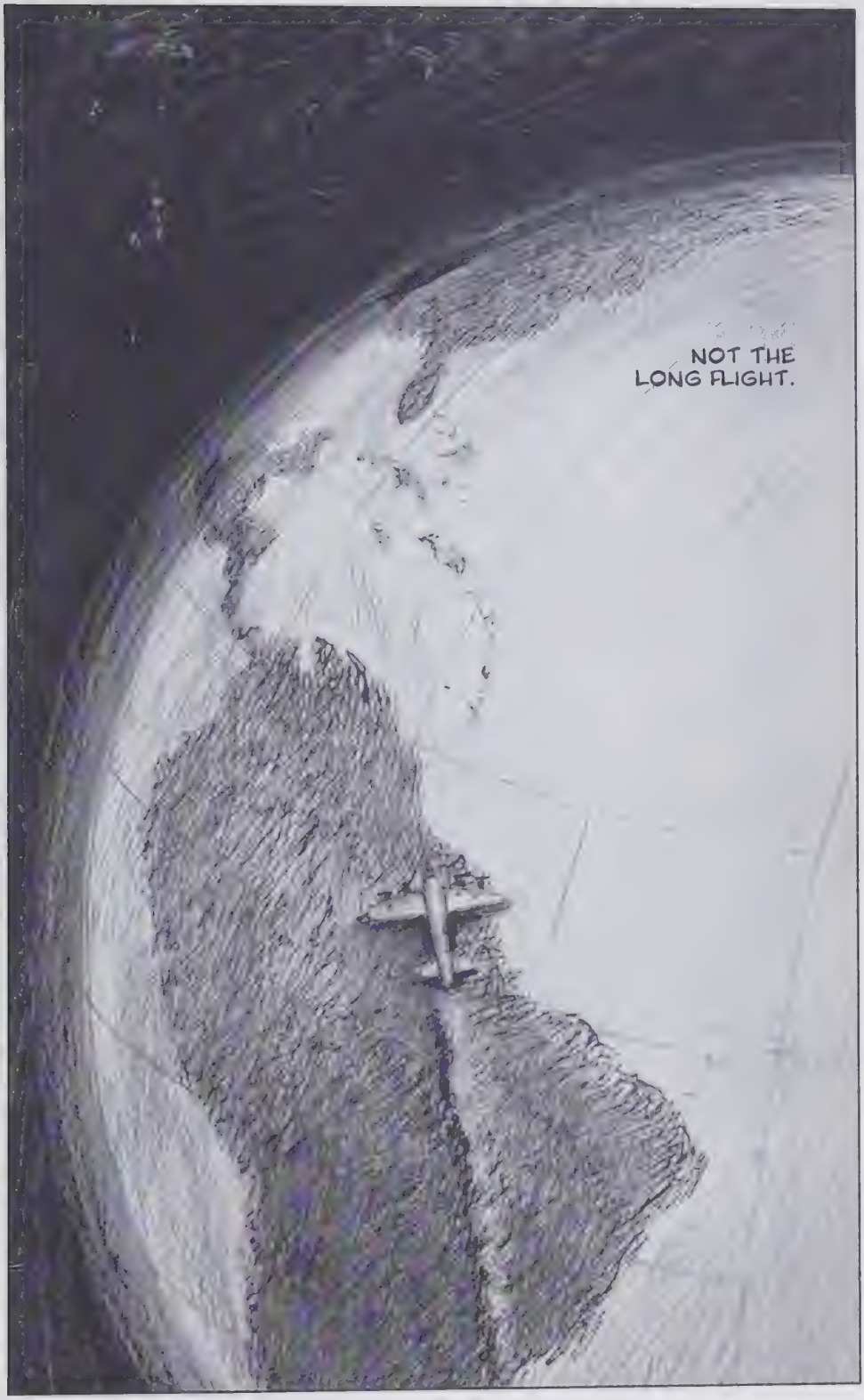
AND THE CURIOUS ROLE OF RACE IN WHO I WOULD BECOME.

chapter 2

PASSAGE

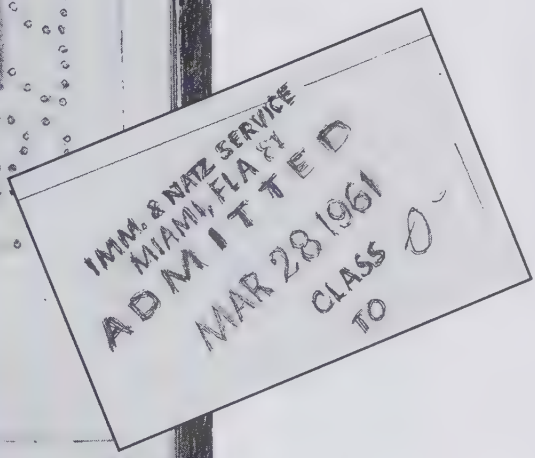
MUCH I HAVE FORGOTTEN,
BUT NOT THE LAST GLIMPSE.



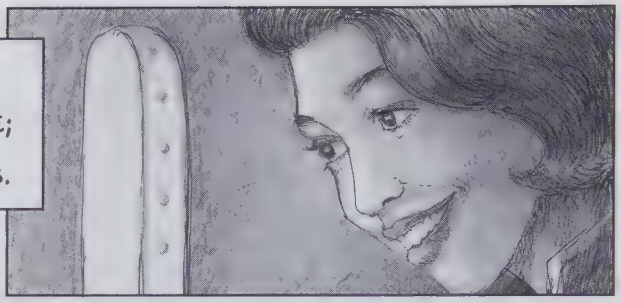

NOT THE
LONG FLIGHT.

NOT THE FIRST HARRIED
HOUR IN THE NEW COUNTRY.

NOT THE COLD PLUNGE INTO ANOTHER WORLD.

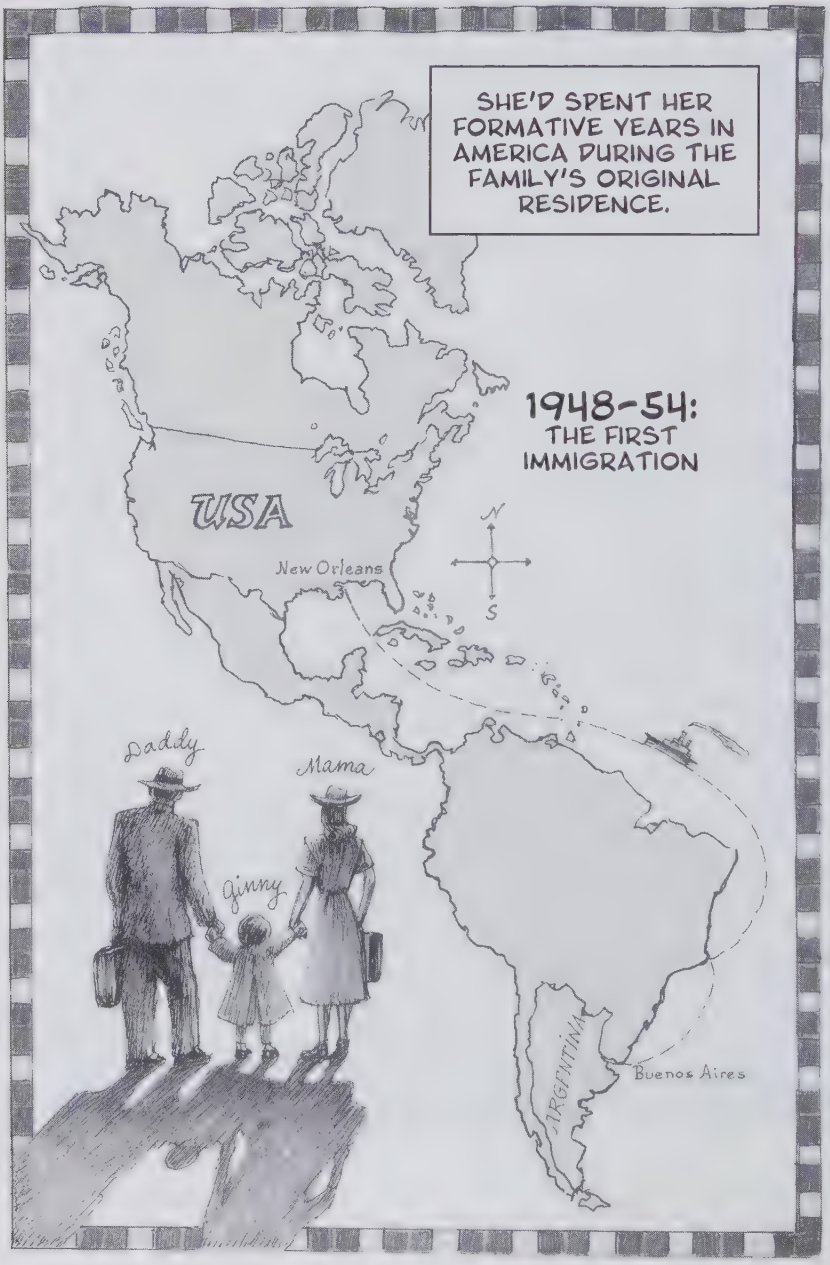


FOR GINNY, IT WAS NO COLD PLUNGE; IT WAS A HOMECOMING.

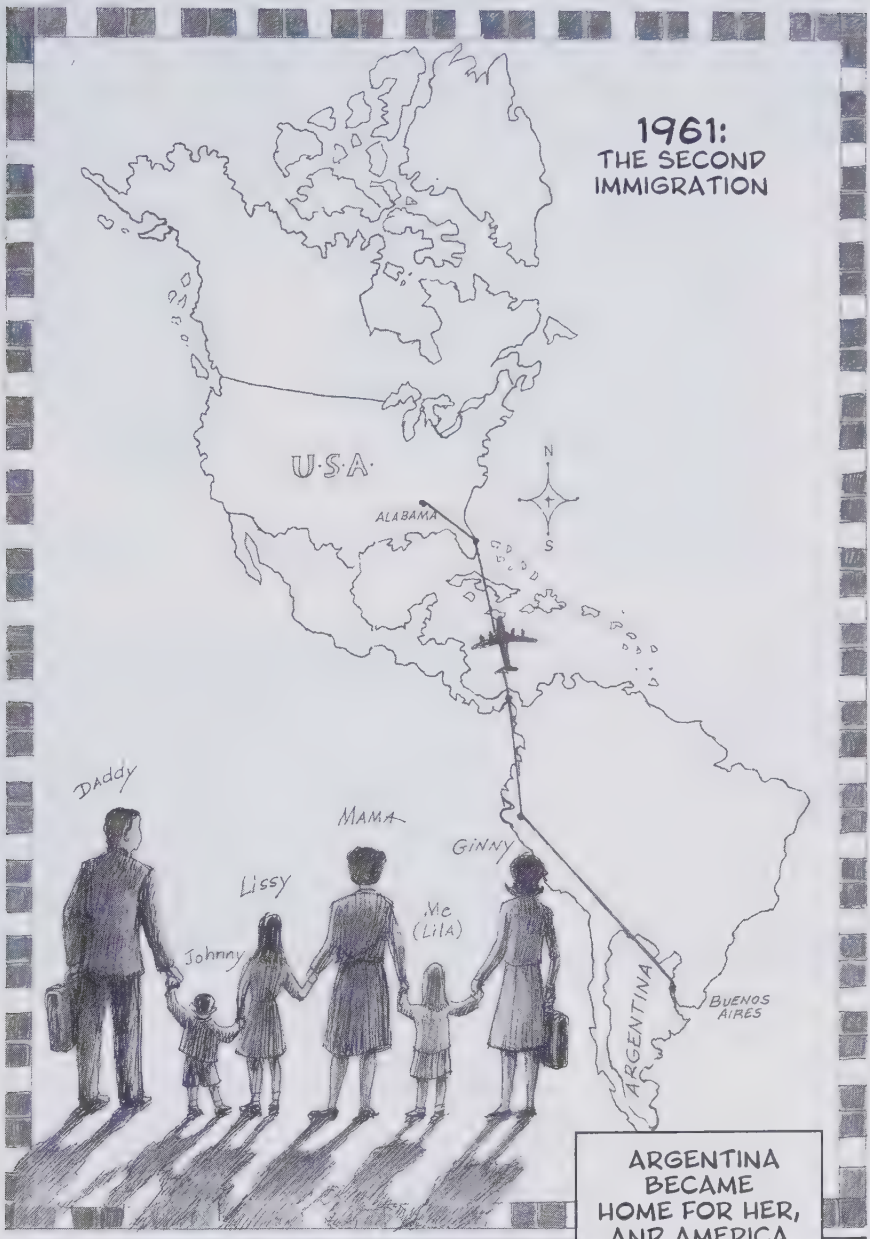


SHE'D SPENT HER FORMATIVE YEARS IN AMERICA DURING THE FAMILY'S ORIGINAL RESIDENCE.

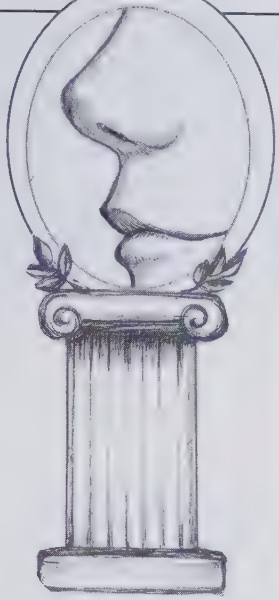
1948-54: THE FIRST IMMIGRATION



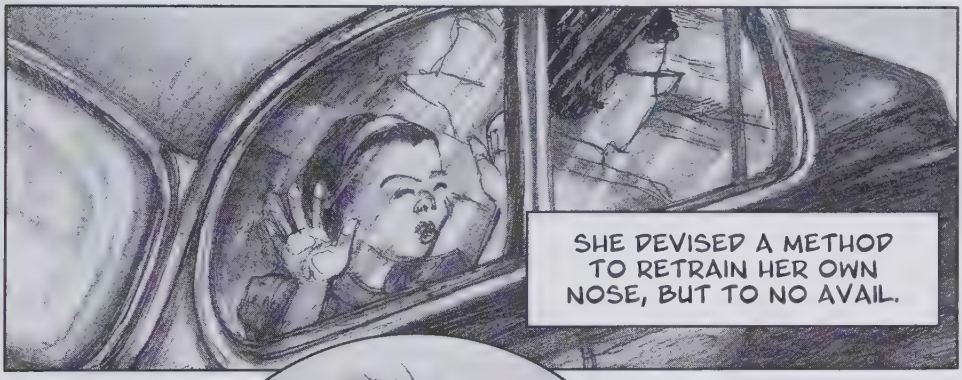
FOR LISSY, ALL THAT WAS REVERSED. SHE WAS BORN IN AMERICA IN 1951, RETURNED TO ARGENTINA AT THE AGE OF THREE, AND SPENT SEVEN CRITICAL YEARS THERE.



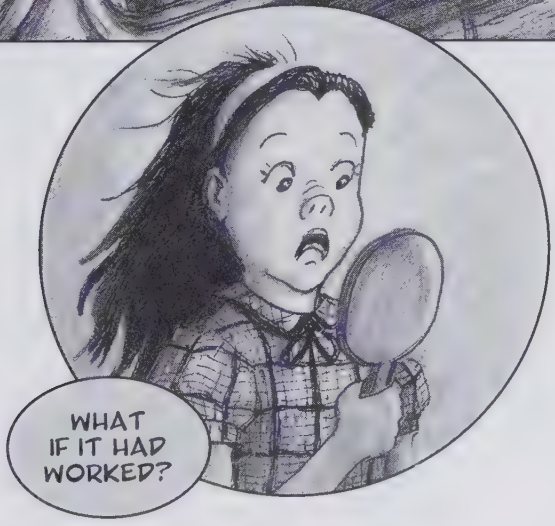
CHILDREN, LET'S WELCOME OUR NEW STUDENT!
SHOW THE CLASS WHERE YOU'RE FROM, DEAR.
IN A ROOM FULL OF ANGLO CHILDREN, LISSY FELT DARK AND CONSPICUOUS.
A FEW ROWS OVER, A GIRL NAMED CHERYL RADIATED EVERYTHING LISSY FOUND ENVIABLE.
EVERYTHING AMERICAN.

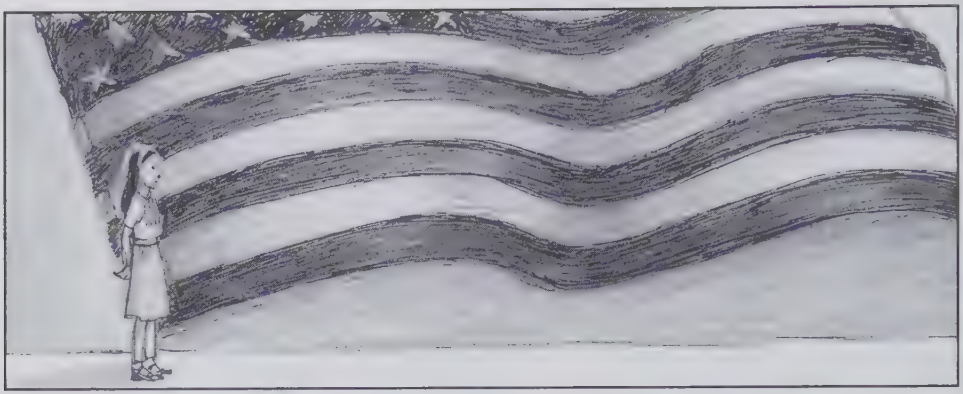


BOUNCY BLOND HAIR AND A CUTE, TURNED-UP NOSE: CHERYL'S PERFECTION LEFT LISSY AWESTRUCK.

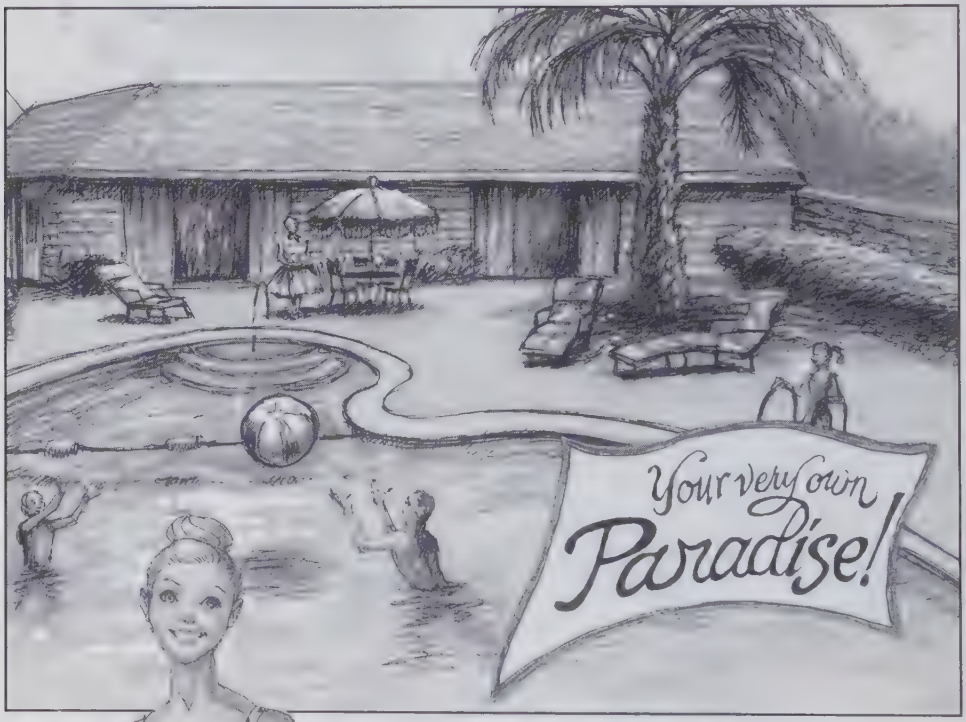


SHE DEVISED A METHOD TO RETRAIN HER OWN NOSE, BUT TO NO AVAIL.





LISSY'S VISION OF AMERICA CAME FROM THE PAGES OF MCCALL'S AND OTHER WOMEN'S MAGAZINES SHE'D STUDIED BACK IN ARGENTINA.



CHERYL COULD'VE PASSED FOR A CUTOUT FROM THIS BLOND WONDERLAND OF SPARKLING PROMISE.

ACCORDING TO THE MAGAZINES, AMERICA BRIMMED OVER WITH THE STUFF OF DREAMS.
Heaven

BUT MARION FELL SHORT OF LISSY'S GLAMOROUS EXPECTATIONS.

CLEANERS

THE MAGAZINES HAD NEVER SHOWN THEM.

IN ARGENTINA, PEOPLE OF AFRICAN ORIGIN WERE A RARE SIGHT.

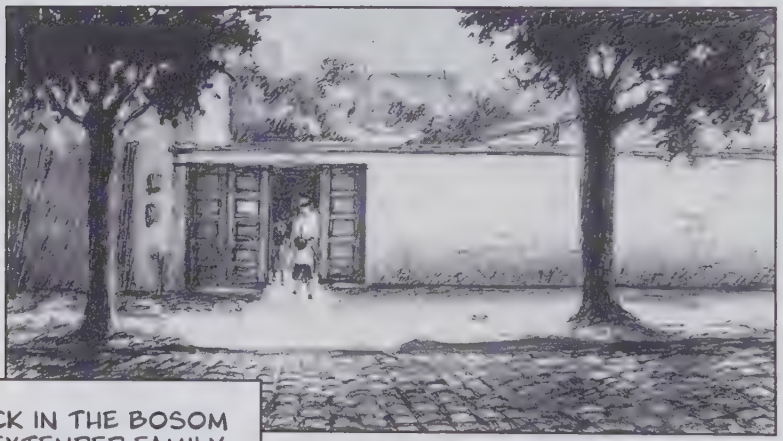
WHEN WE ARRIVED IN ALABAMA, MY BROTHER GOT HIS FIRST GLIMPSE.

chapter 3

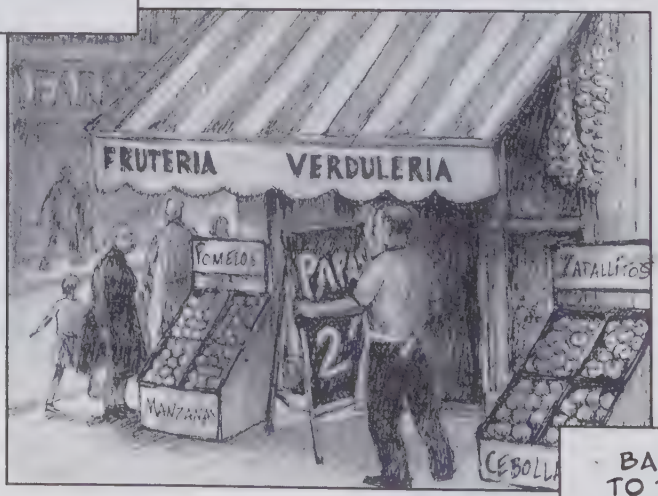
BLENDING IN

WE WEREN'T MEANT TO PUT DOWN ROOTS IN ALABAMA.

AND SOMEDAY, RESUME OUR LIVES IN BUENOS AIRES,



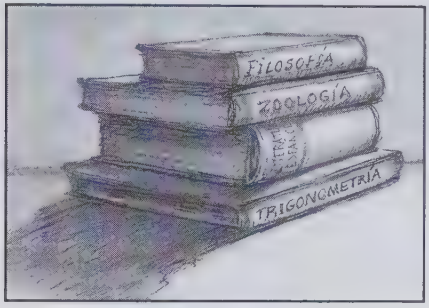
BACK IN THE BOSOM OF EXTENDED FAMILY,



BACK TO THE BARRIOS,

BACK TO THE LIFE A GIRL IN ARGENTINA WOULD'VE FOLLOWED,

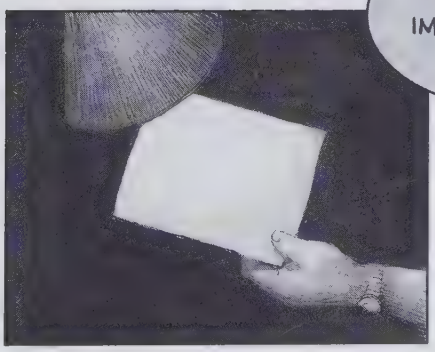
STARTING WITH *LA ESCUELA PRIMARIA,*



THEN THE *LICEO* FOR YOUNG LADIES,

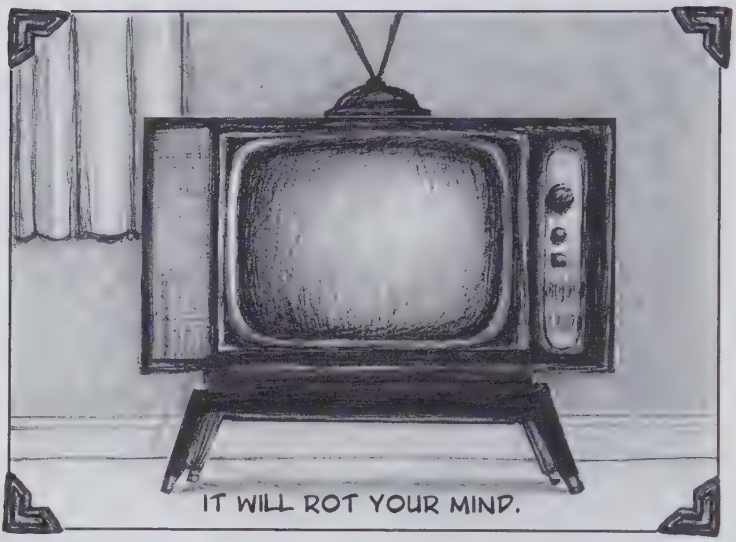
NEXT UNIVERSITY, AND THEN...

?



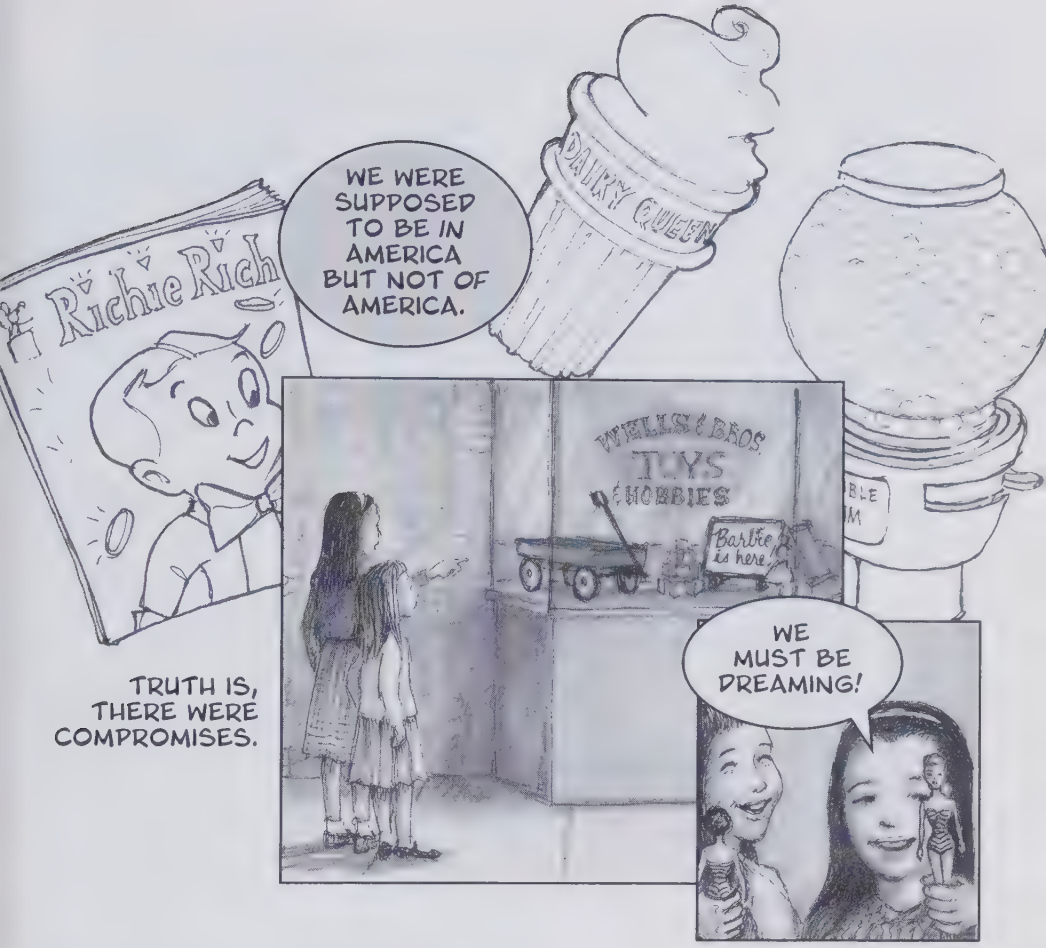
AND ALTHOUGH FOR SOME YEARS MAMA AND DADDY WOULD SAY, "WHEN WE GO BACK," IT NEVER HAPPENED. WE STAYED IN THE U.S. AND LIVED A DIFFERENT LIFE.

MY PARENTS TOOK A HARD LINE AGAINST THE UNDESIRABLE WAYS OF OUR NEW CULTURE.

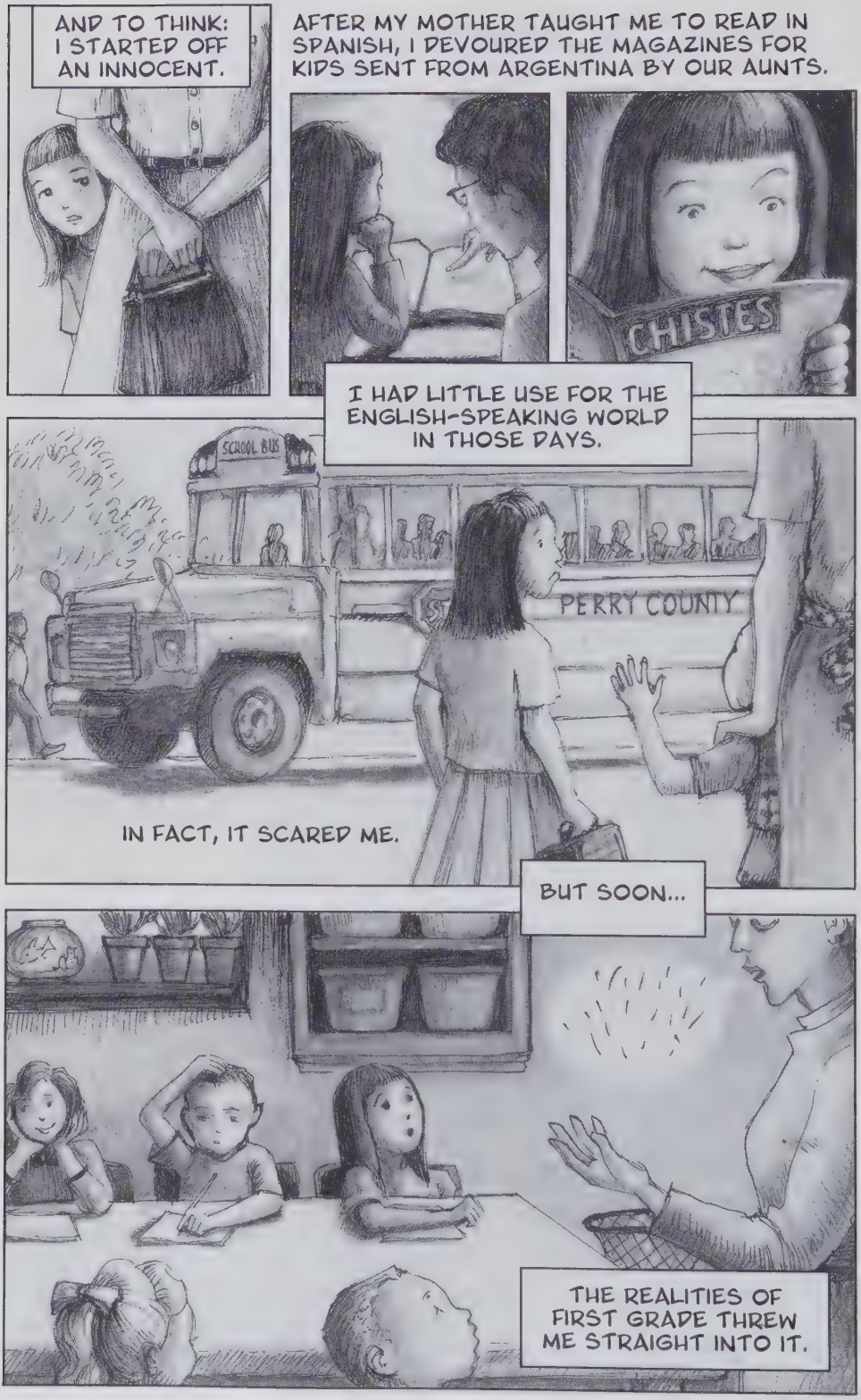


IT WILL ROT YOUR TEETH.

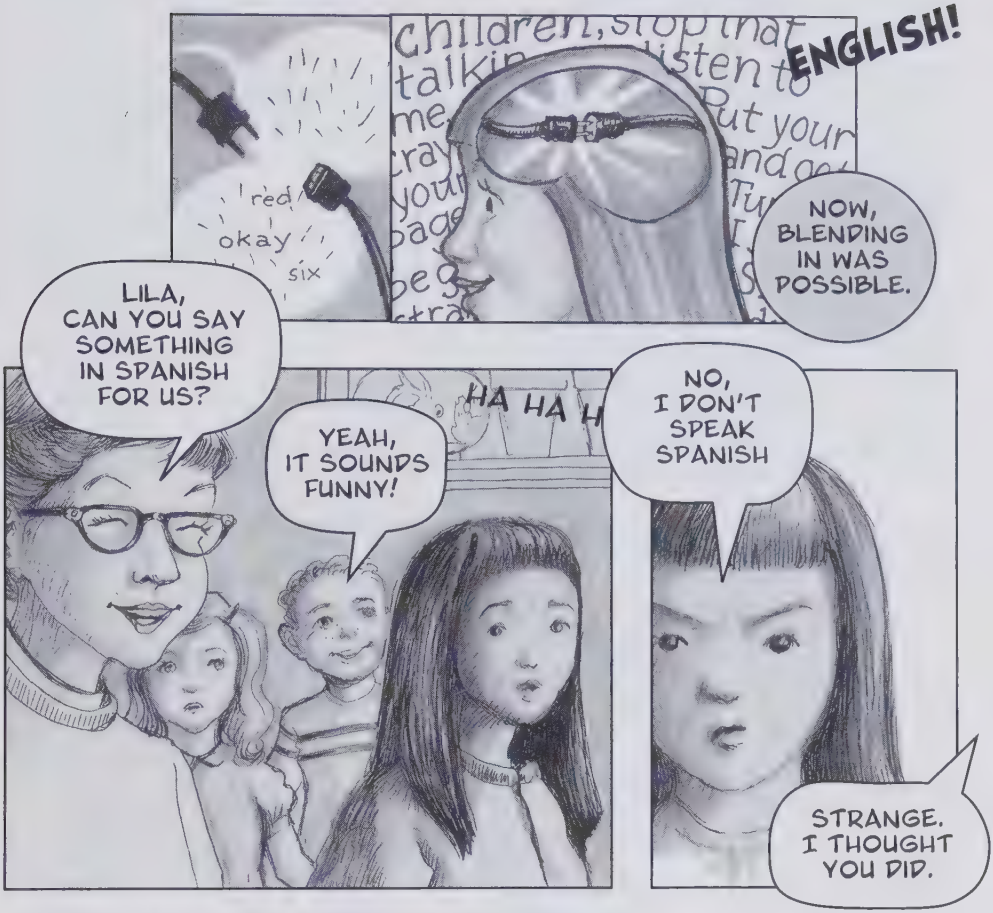
IT WILL ROT YOUR TONGUE.



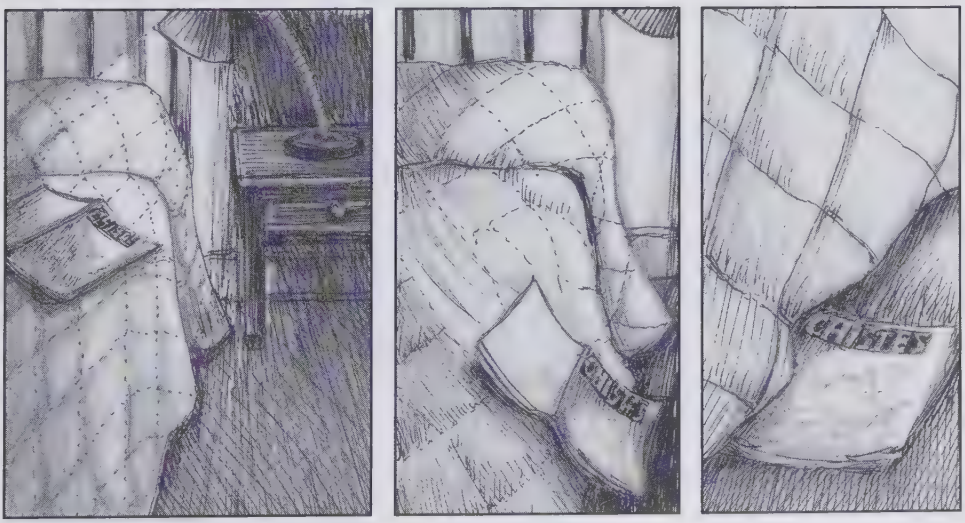
AND I LEARNED HOW TO SNEAK.


AND TO THINK: I STARTED OFF AN INNOCENT.
AFTER MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME TO READ IN SPANISH, I DEVOURED THE MAGAZINES FOR KIDS SENT FROM ARGENTINA BY OUR AUNTS.
CHISTES
I HAD LITTLE USE FOR THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD IN THOSE DAYS.
SCHOOL BUS
PERRY COUNTY
IN FACT, IT SCARED ME.
BUT SOON...
THE REALITIES OF FIRST GRADE THREW ME STRAIGHT INTO IT.

I CAN'T EXPLAIN HOW, BUT IT SEEMS AS IF COMPREHENSION CAME TO ME ALL AT ONCE.



AS I RESISTED MY NATIVE TONGUE, IT BEGAN TO RECEDE INTO DUSTY CORNERS.

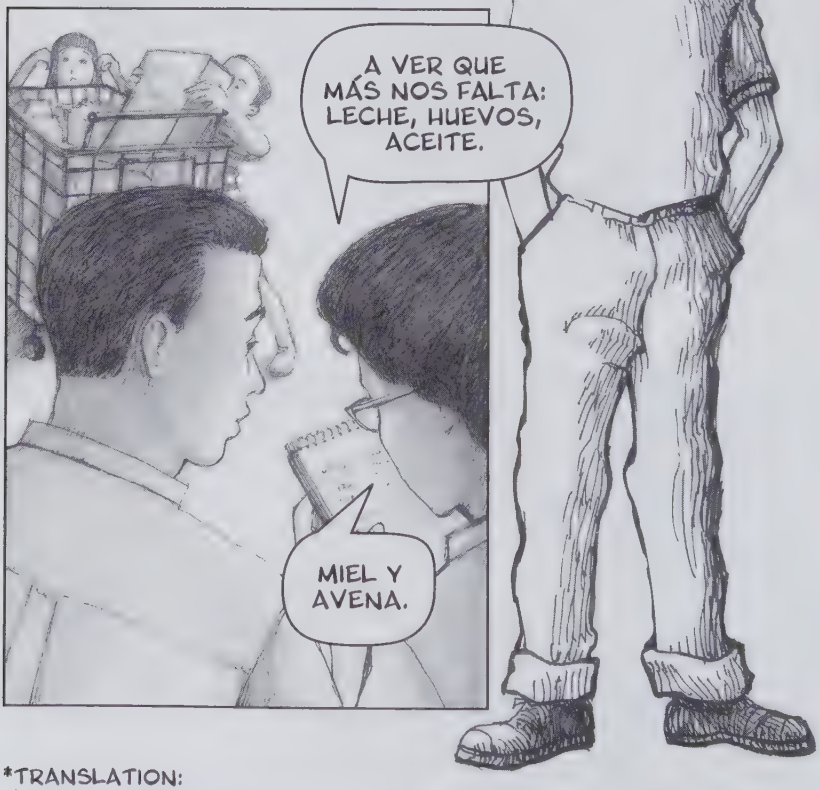


BUT MY PARENTS FELT NO SUCH HESITATION. THEY KEPT SPEAKING SPANISH AT HOME AND IN PUBLIC,

MUY LINDOS TOMATES.*

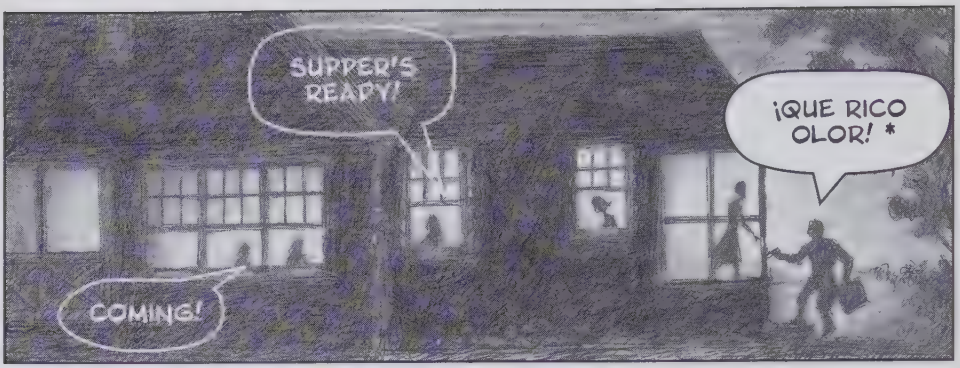
?

AS IF IT WERE THE MOST NORMAL THING—WHICH IN MARION, IT WAS *NOT*.

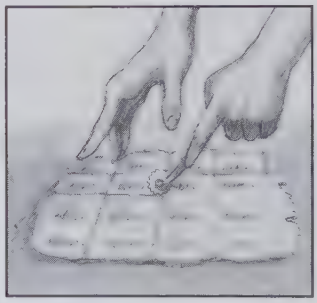


*TRANSLATION:
VERY NICE TOMATOES.
LET'S SEE WHAT ELSE WE NEED. MILK, EGGS, OIL. HONEY AND OATMEAL.

*AND WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER?



AT HOME, WHERE I DIDN'T CARE WHAT LANGUAGE WAS SPOKEN, CREATIVITY FLOURISHED.

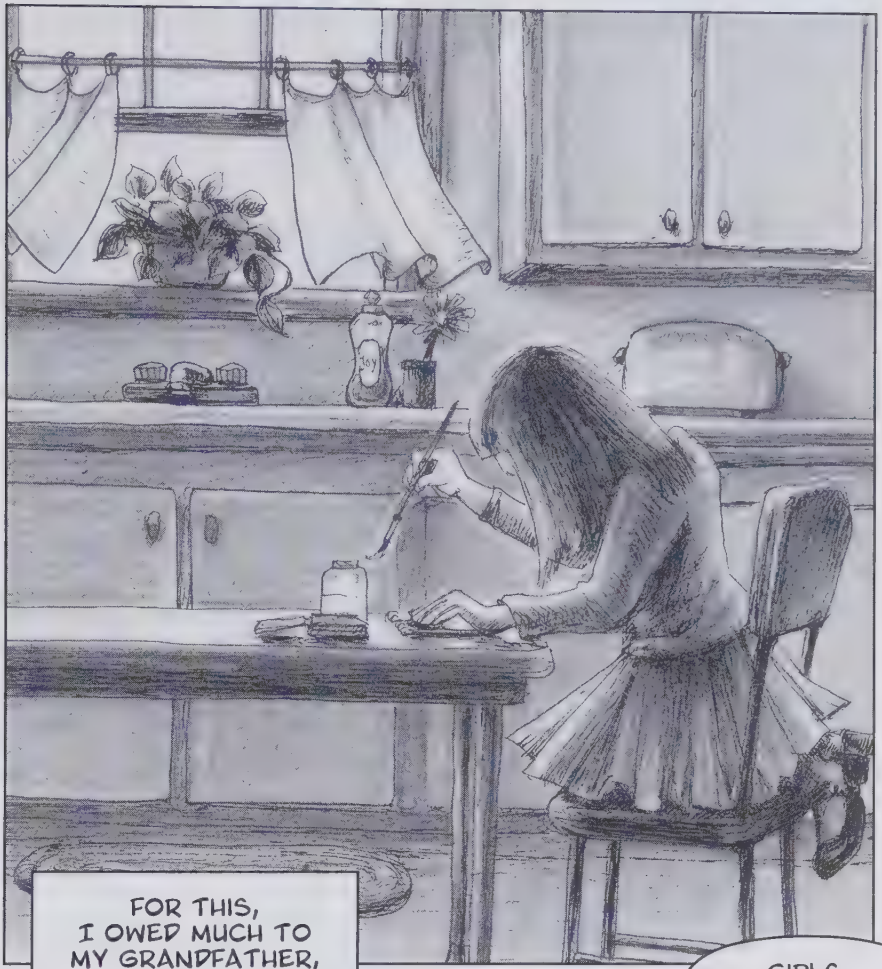


MAMA BAKED FRENCH BREAD, KNITTED SWEATERS, AND PREPARED GASTRONOMIC DELIGHTS LIKE RAVIOLI.

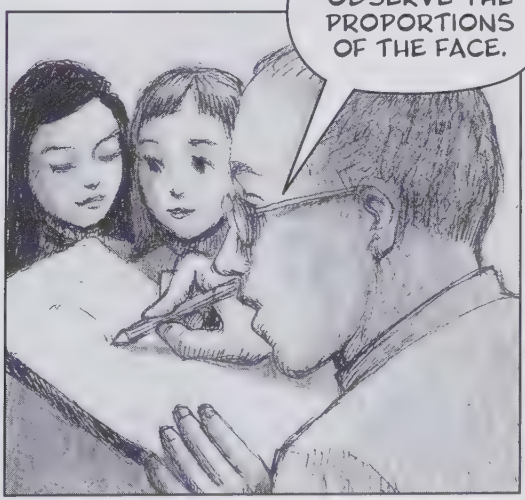
SHE ALSO PAINTED PORTRAITS FOR CLIENTS ALL OVER ALABAMA AND POINTS BEYOND.

* WHAT A DELICIOUS SMELL!

I OFTEN LOST MYSELF IN MAKING ART.



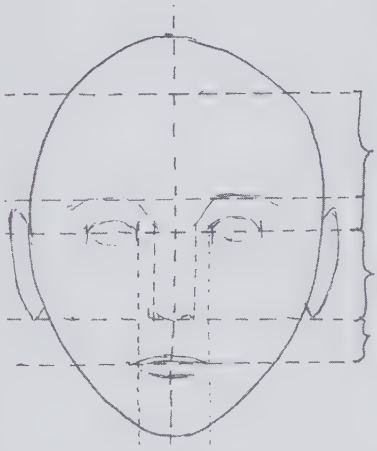
FOR THIS, I OWED MUCH TO MY GRANDFATHER, WHO TAUGHT HIS DAUGHTERS THE RIGORS OF DRAFTSMANSHIP.



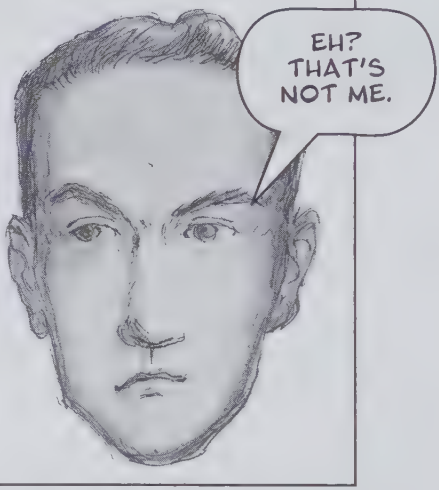
MAMA PASSED THESE LESSONS ON TO US, HER CHILDREN.

THE LESSON

YOU ALWAYS BEGAN WITH AN IDEALIZED FACE.



AS YOU PROGRESSED, NEW CONCEPTS WERE INTRODUCED:



REAL FACES DON'T OBEY THOSE RULES. THEY VARY LIKE CRAZY!

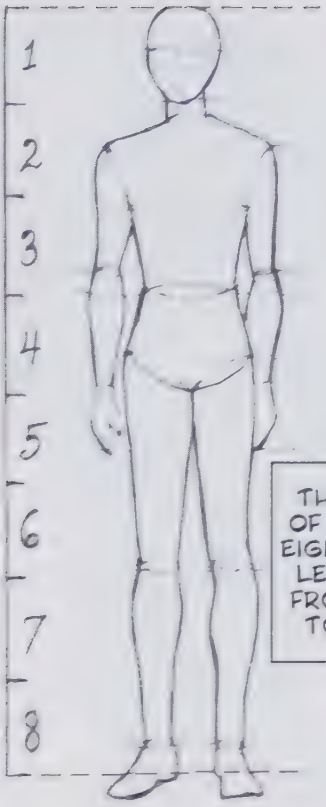
AND THE FACE ISN'T COMPOSED OF FLAT SHAPES.

INSTEAD, EVERY PLANE, EVERY FEATURE,

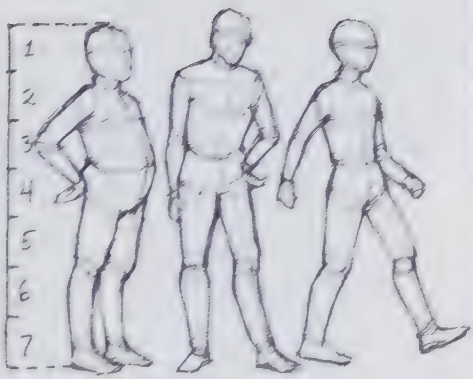
IS A FULLY DIMENSIONAL STRUCTURE WHOSE APPEARANCE VARIES DEPENDING ON THE ANGLE OF VIEW.

AND THE ONLY WAY TO DRAW IT CORRECTLY IS TO LOOK— ***REALLY LOOK.***

THE LESSON CONTINUED WITH PROPORTIONS OF THE HUMAN BODY.



THE RULE OF THUMB: EIGHT HEAD LENGTHS FROM TOP TO TOE.



AS YOU LEARNED TO LOOK—*REALLY* LOOK—YOU BEGAN TO SEE THE WISHFUL THINKING BEHIND THAT FORMULA.

LISSY AND I WERE NOWHERE NEAR RELINQUISHING THOSE IDEALS WHEN WE LAID EYES ON THE RAVISHING ELKE SOMMER, A SCREEN STAR OF THE 1960S.

WE PERSUADED MAMA TO DRAW A PAPER DOLL FOR US BASED ON ELKE. WE DREW AND COLORED HER GLAMOROUS WARDROBE.
WE GAVE HER CHANEL FOR THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES.
Blush Pink
PC 928

SOMETHING COOL AND BREEZY FOR BIARRITZ.
SOMETHING WARM AND COZY FOR THE MATTERHORN.
AND A TROVE OF GORGEOUS DRESSES THE LIKES OF WHICH WE'D NEVER SEEN.

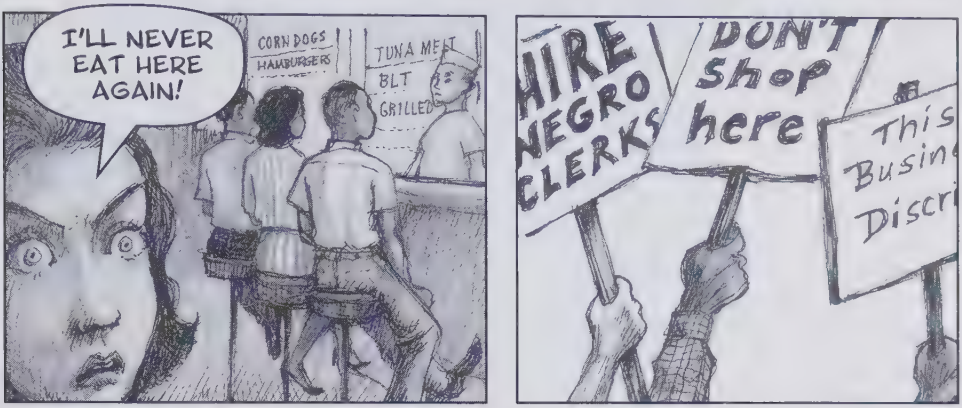
chapter 4

GINNY'S BOOKS

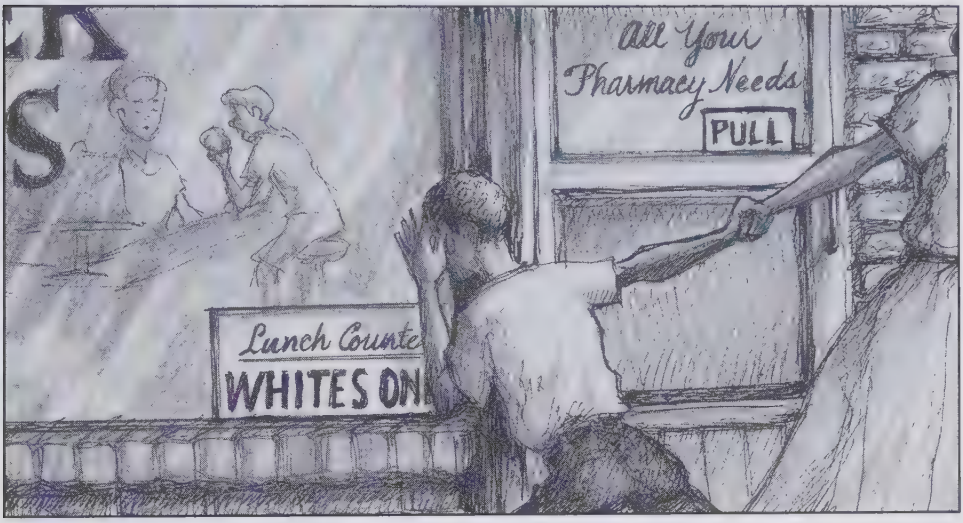
WE ARRIVED IN AN ALABAMA SIMMERING WITH RACIAL STRIFE.

OF WHICH I REMAINED COMPLETELY OBLIVIOUS.

ALL OVER THE SOUTH, "OUR WAY OF LIFE" HAD COME UNDER SIEGE.



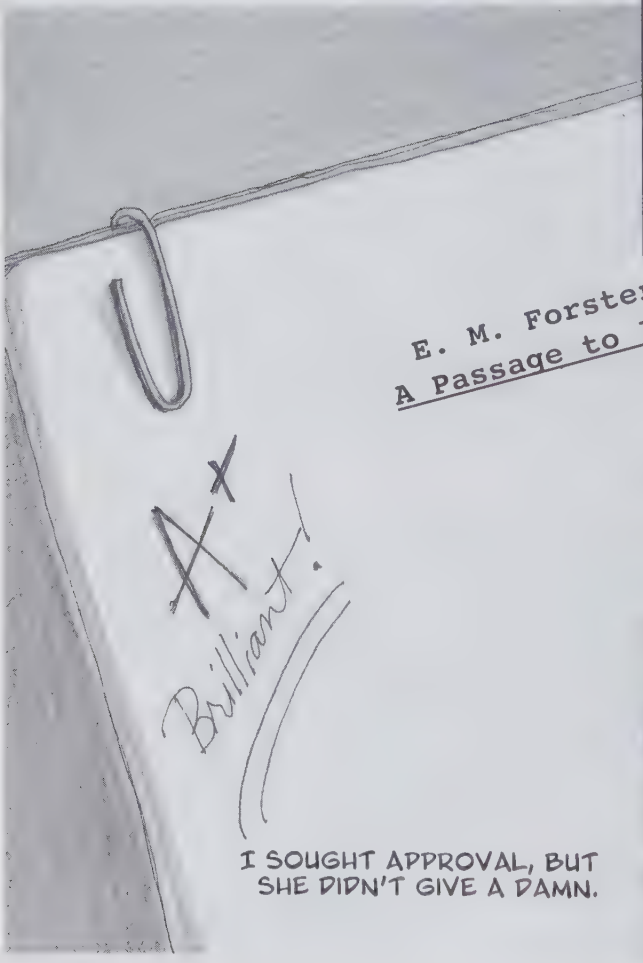
DEEP IN THE HEART OF DIXIE, JIM CROW HADN'T YET SURRENDERED TO THE INEVITABLE. BUT HIS DAYS WERE NUMBERED.



IT WAS THE SIGNS THAT HELPED ME SEE.

MY SISTER GINNY, 11 YEARS OLDER, OPENED MY EYES TO MANY THINGS.

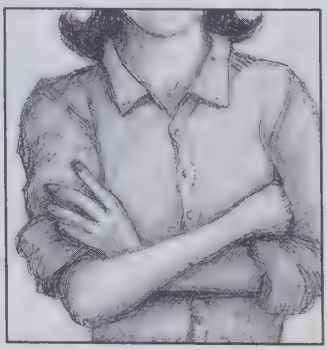
SHE WAS HIP AND GAVE BRAINS GLAMOUR, UNLIKE ANY OTHER SMART GIRL I KNEW.



I SOUGHT APPROVAL, BUT SHE DIDN'T GIVE A DAMN.

I MOLDED, BUT GINNY REFUSED TO CONFORM.

I TREMBLED, BUT SHE DARED TO QUESTION AUTHORITY.



JUDSON COLLEGE, WHERE GINNY STUDIED, SHAPED YOUNG LADIES INTO SCHOLARS AND SOUTHERN BELLES.

WHAT, THEN, DID THEY MAKE OF GINNY AND HER ICONOCLASTIC WAYS?

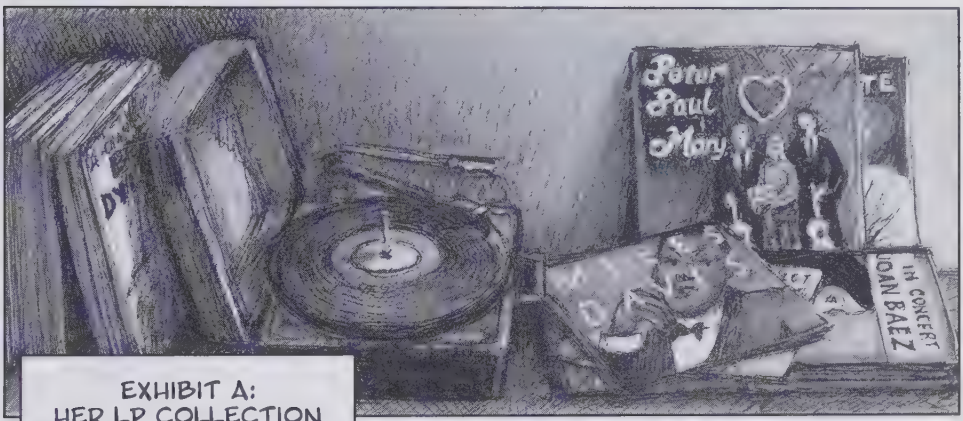


EXHIBIT A:
HER LP COLLECTION

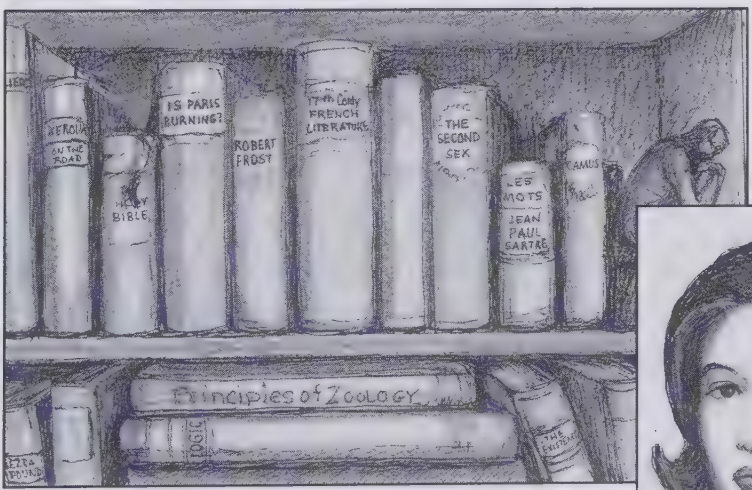
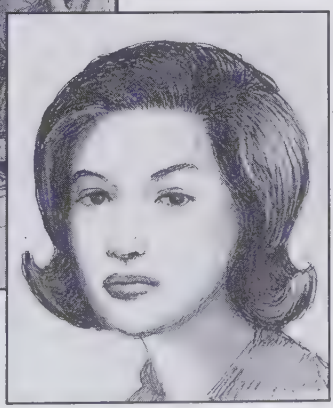


EXHIBIT B:
HER BOOKS

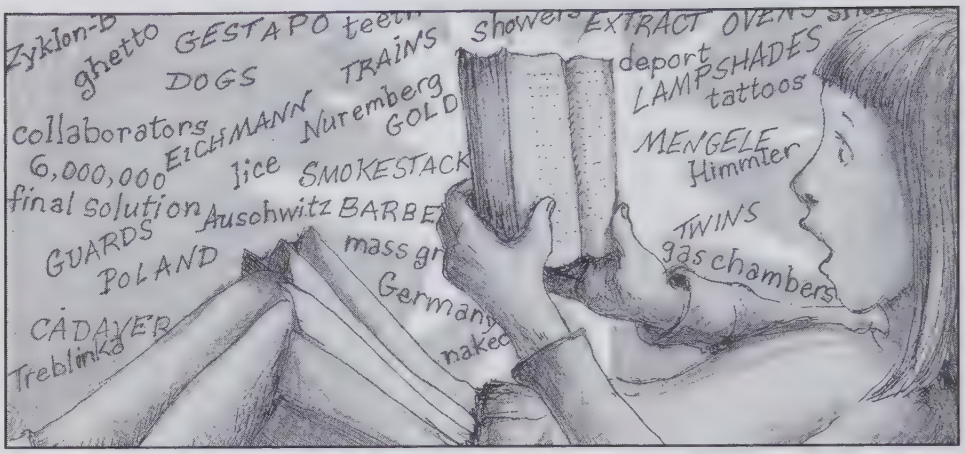
EXHIBIT C:
HER EYES.



SHE'D RAISED THE DROP-DEAD STARE TO AN ART FORM.

I IDOLIZED HER.

READING GINNY'S BOOKS FILLED OUT MY EDUCATION.



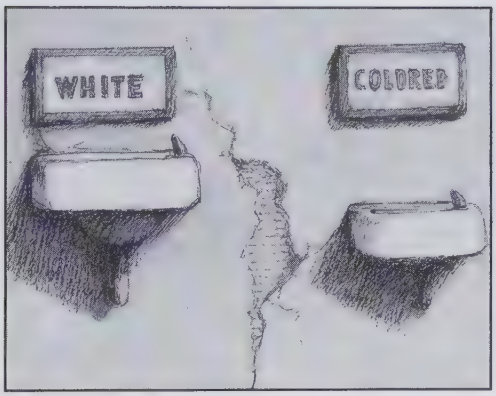
I LEARNED ABOUT THINGS THAT TEACHERS NEVER MENTIONED.

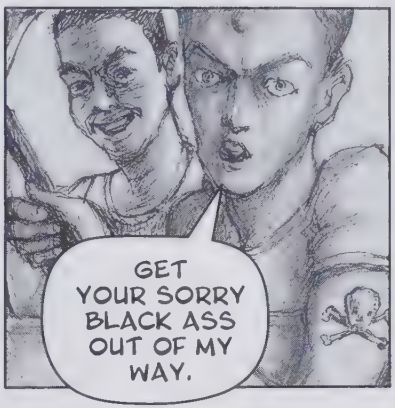
AND THAT EVEN MY BIG SISTERS PASSED OFF WITH AN "I'LL TELL YOU WHEN YOU'RE OLDER."

IN THE PAGES OF *BLACK LIKE ME*, I READ THE ACCOUNT OF A WHITE WRITER, JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, WHO IN 1959 WENT UNDERCOVER AS A BLACK MAN.

HE DARKENED HIS SKIN WITH THE AID OF A DRUG.

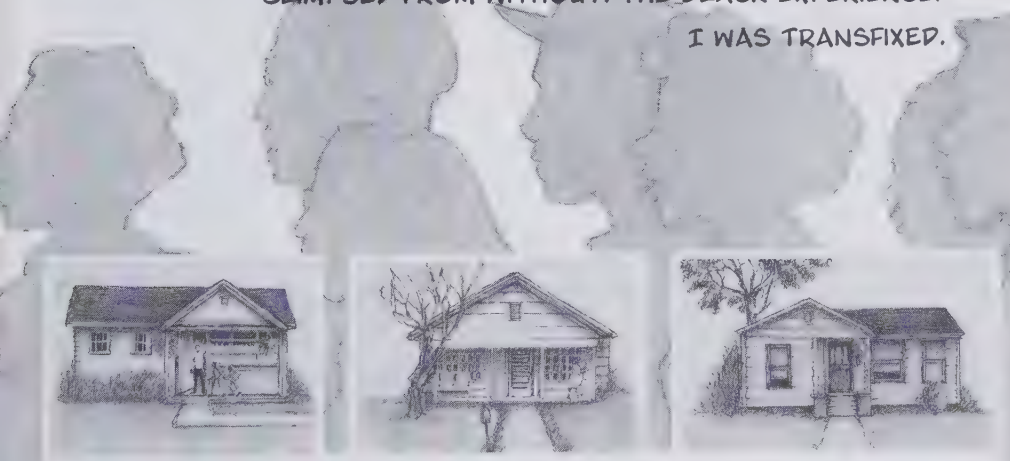
HE WENT AROUND THE SOUTH FOOLING PEOPLE OF BOTH RACES, SUBJECTING HIMSELF TO THE INDIGNITIES AND PERILS FACED BY MEN OF COLOR EVERY DAY.





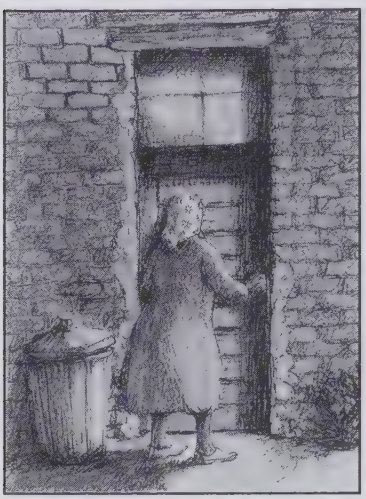
HE ENTERED A WORLD THAT MOST WHITE PEOPLE HAD ONLY GLIMPSED FROM WITHOUT: THE BLACK EXPERIENCE.

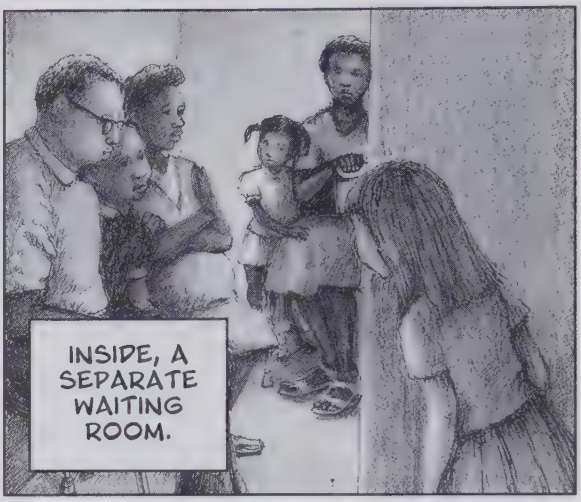
I WAS TRANSFIXED.



JUST BENEATH THE VENEER OF MY HOMETOWN WAS SUCH A WORLD.

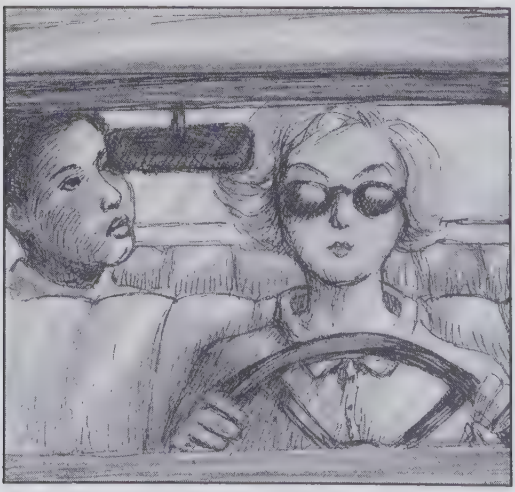
BLACK PATIENTS USED THE HEALTH CLINIC'S ALLEY ENTRANCE.





I SAW THAT BLACK MAIDS WERE SUPPOSED TO SIT IN THE BACK SEAT OF THEIR EMPLOYERS' CARS.

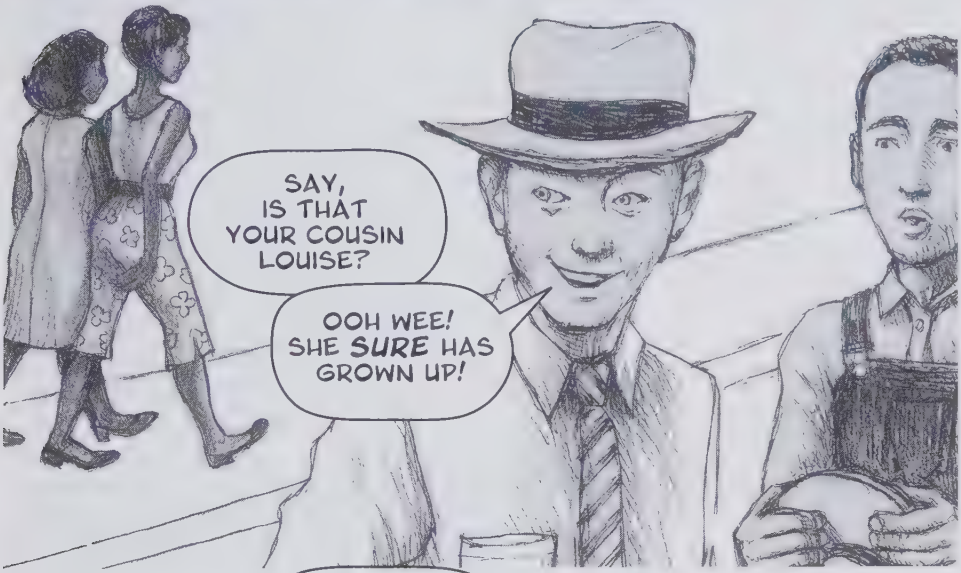
I SAW THAT BLACK PEOPLE WERE SUPPOSED TO...

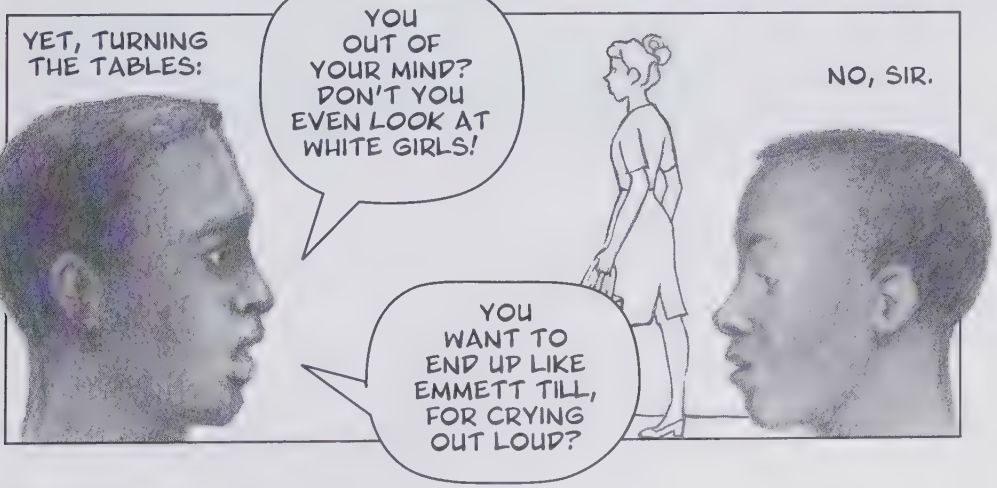


...GO AROUND TO THE BACK DOOR OF WHITE PEOPLE'S HOUSES.

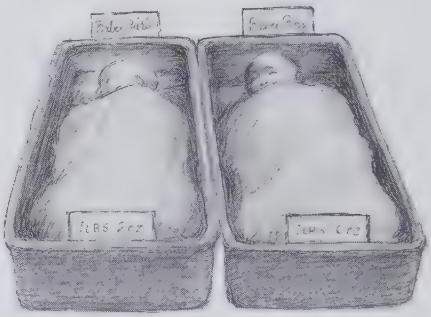
I SAW THAT EACH SIDE AFFORDED THE OTHER A DISTINCT INTERPRETATION OF RESPECT.

AND I SAW OTHER INEQUITIES.



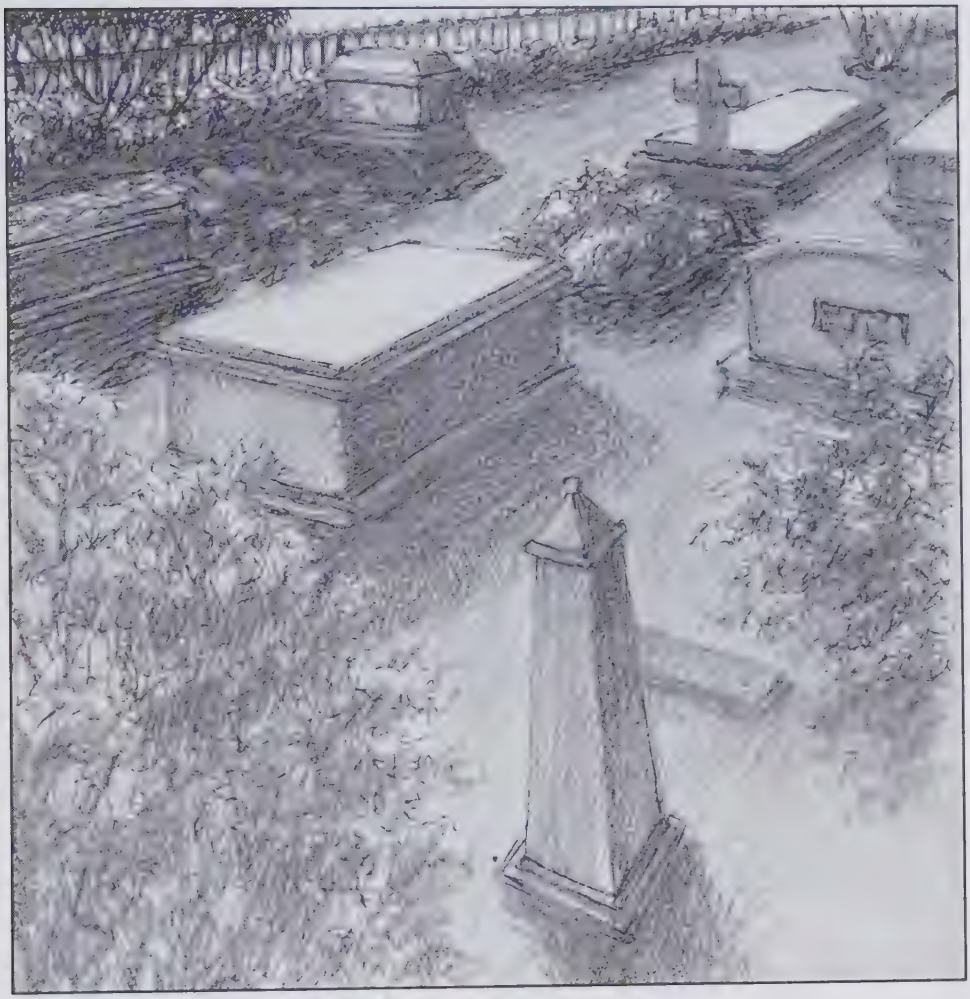


I SAW THAT THESE SEPARATIONS



BEGAN IN THE HOSPITAL NURSERY.

AND RAN STRAIGHT TO THE GRAVEYARD.



I WAS A 2ND GRADER WHEN THE PHYSICAL WORLD GREW HAZY.

MAMA, EVERYTHING'S BLURRY.

WE WERE THERE TO SEE JERRY LEWIS IN *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*.

BUT EVEN NEARSIGHTED, I SAW THAT BLACK PEOPLE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO SIT IN THE BALCONY.

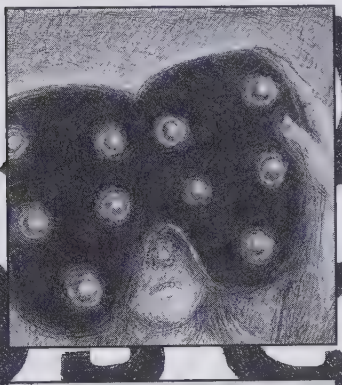
HA HA HA HA

NOBODY ELSE SEEMED HORRIFIED.

SOMETIMES PEOPLE IN THE BALCONY STOMPED AND WHISTLED AND JEERED.

SOMETIMES THEY RAINED POPCORN DOWN ON OUR HEADS.

NO WHITE PERSON COULD'VE SAID, "OH, I HAD NO IDEA!"



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MO FWDV

TDCRZXLGPQMFN

WRZJBQSGHFOLACJKR

THE VISUAL WORLD WAS A THING OF WONDER. I HADN'T SUSPECTED ITS BREADTH AND RICHNESS. BUT NOW I SAW.

STILL, MY EYEGLASSES DIDN'T CORRECT A PARTICULAR BLINDSPOT:

THE FACES OF BLACK PEOPLE LOOKED INTERCHANGEABLE TO ME.

I KNEW ONLY ONE BLACK PERSON IN THOSE DAYS—MRS. JACKSON, THE LADY THAT HELPED OUT WITH IRONING NOW AND THEN.

SHE REFUSED INVITATIONS TO JOIN THE FAMILY AT LUNCH, WHICH LEFT ME ASKING, WHY?

I COULDN'T BEAR TO SEE HER EATING ALONE, SO I SAT WITH HER.

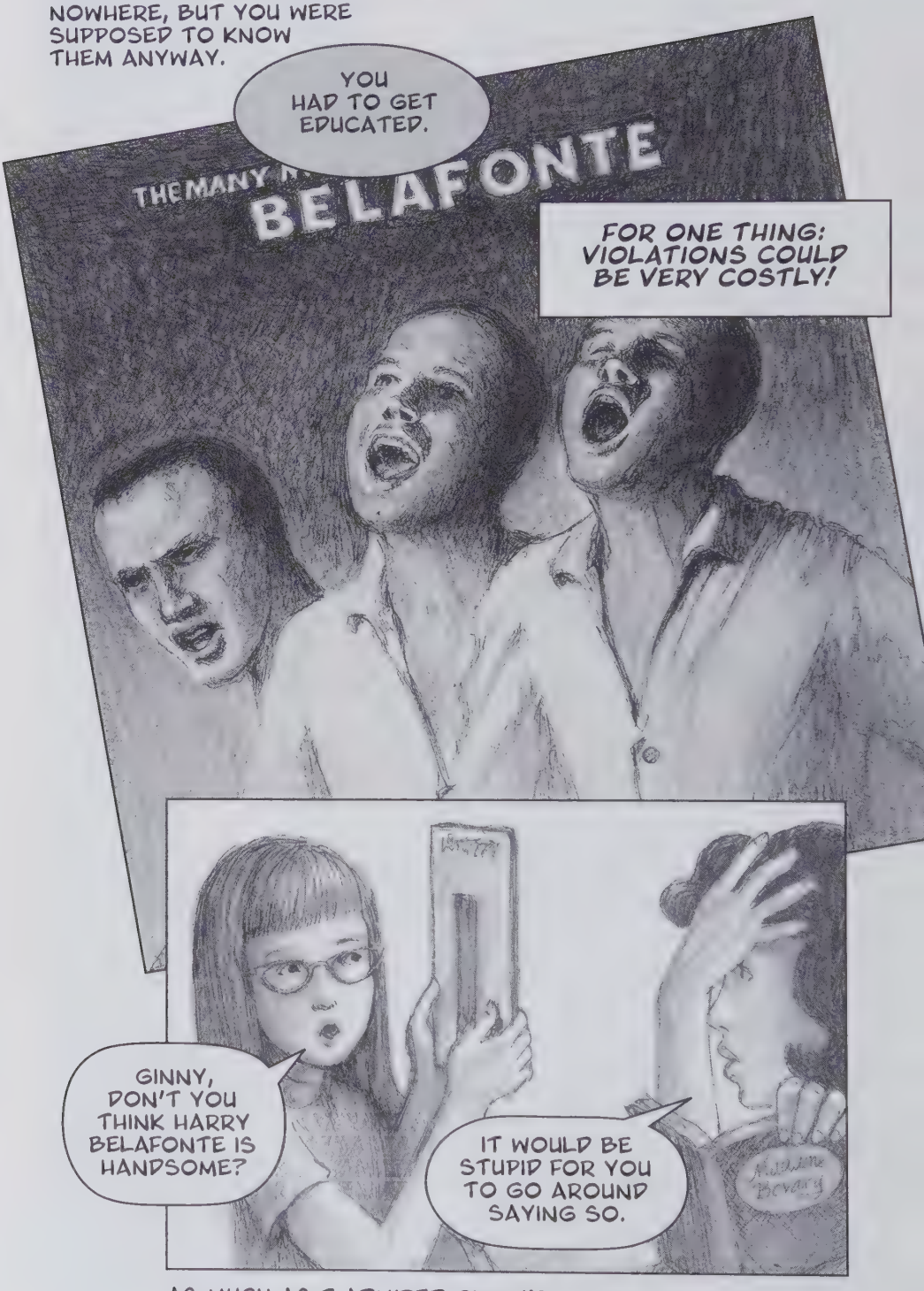
BUT NEITHER OF US SPOKE.

IT'S TRUE THAT OUR FAMILY SAW THINGS FROM A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW.
...l know the tru... ...ch shall set you free.
BEING HOSPITABLE TO PEOPLE OF ALL RACES, FOR EXAMPLE.

ONCE, A FATHER AND SON CAME TO OUR HOUSE TO SEEK MAMA'S ASSESSMENT OF THE BOY'S ARTISTIC TALENT.

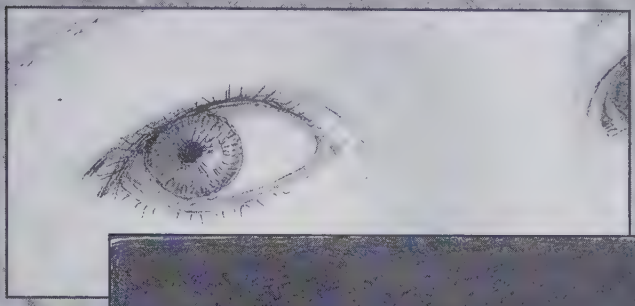
I WAS ENVIOUS OF HIS CARTOON REPRODUCTIONS, WHICH HE'D DRAWN ON THE GRAY BACKSIDES OF DISMANTLED CEREAL BOXES.
WE COULD DO BETTER!
HERE. THIS IS FOR YOU.
UH. I DON'T NEED IT. I HAVE PLENTY OF PAPER.
Sketch PAPER
HIS REFUSAL BAFFLED ME. HERE I WAS, TRYING TO DO A GOOD DEED, AND...?

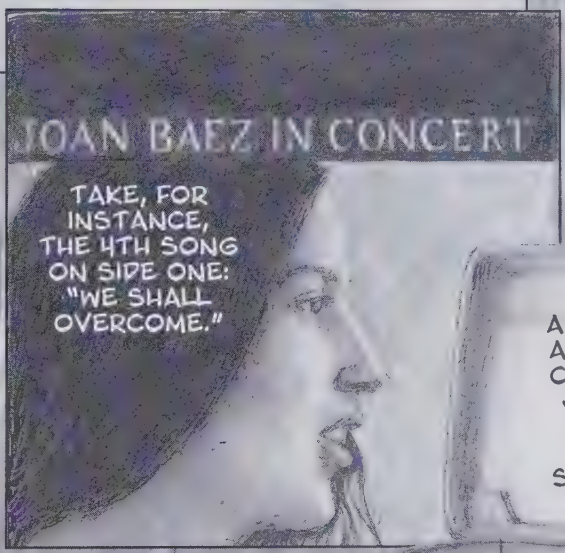
THE RULES THAT GOVERNED RACE RELATIONS WERE WRITTEN DOWN NOWHERE, BUT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO KNOW THEM ANYWAY.



AS MUCH AS I ADMIRED GINNY'S DEFIANCE, I DARED NOT DISRESPECT *THAT* RULE.

I DIDN'T LIKE THAT THESE DIVIDING WALLS EXISTED. GINNY'S BOOKS AND MUSIC HELPED ME PEEK OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE.



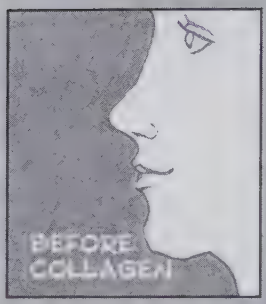


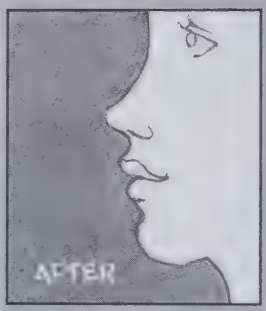
FOR SOME REASON, I PICTURED A DARKENED AUDITORIUM FULL OF PEOPLE HOLDING LIT CANDLES.

I GOT SHIVERS EVERY TIME.

chapter 5

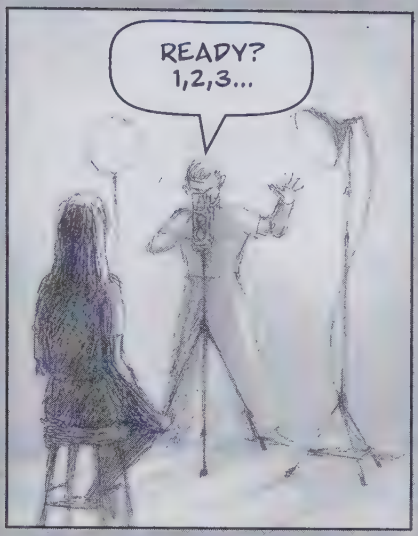
ANCESTRAL LINES



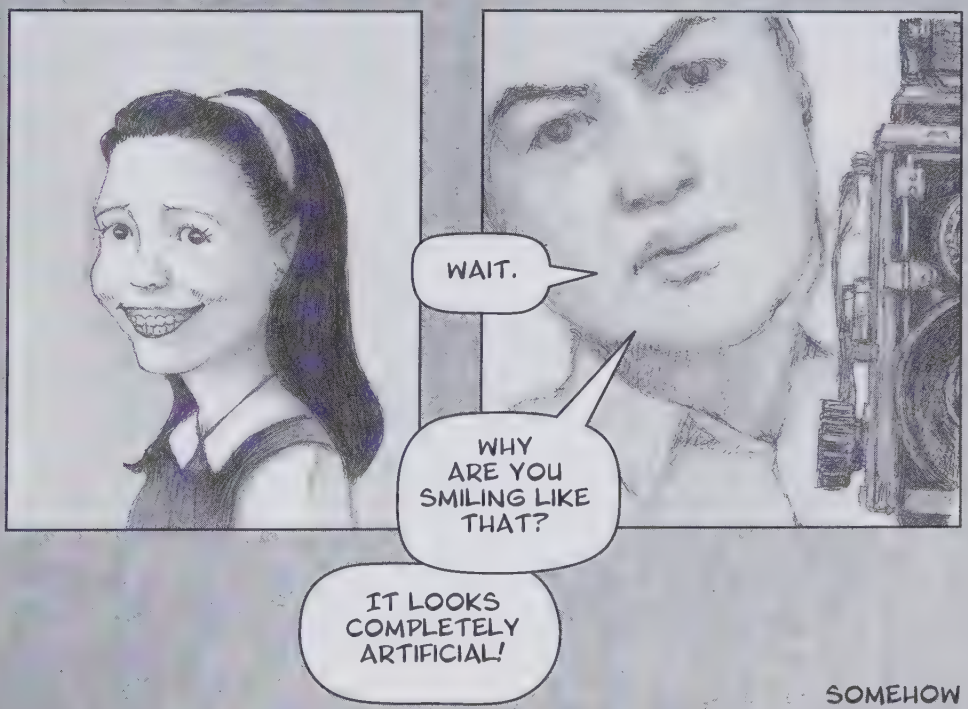


LISSY WAS BORN WITH A MOUTH THAT WOMEN NOWADAYS PAY GOOD MONEY FOR.

BUT NOT IN 1962, HER 5TH-GRADE YEAR.



THE TRICK: SHE TUCKED HER LIPS AGAINST THE GUM AND FLASHED A SHAKY "ANGLO" GRIN AT THE CAMERA.

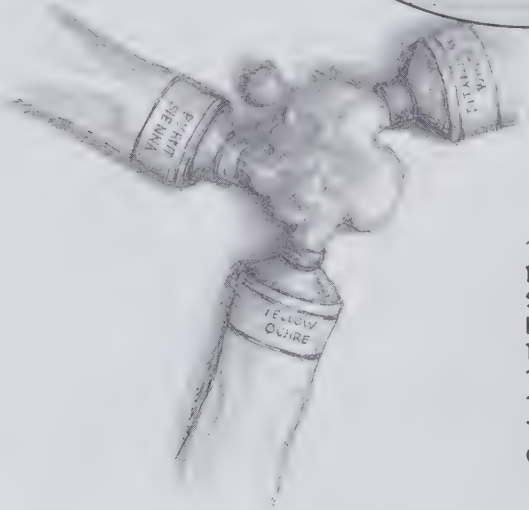


SOMEHOW DADDY LACKED THE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS THAT USUALLY COMES WITH OUTSIDER STATUS.

HE'D ALWAYS BEEN ON THE OUTSIDE. AS A PENNILESS TEENAGER, HE MOVED FROM THE MOUNTAIN PROVINCE OF MENDOZA TO BUENOS AIRES IN SEARCH OF EDUCATION.

ON DADDY'S OFFICIAL ID, HIS SKIN-COLOR DESIGNATION READS, *TRIGUEÑO*.

THE ONLY OTHER CHOICE: WHITE.



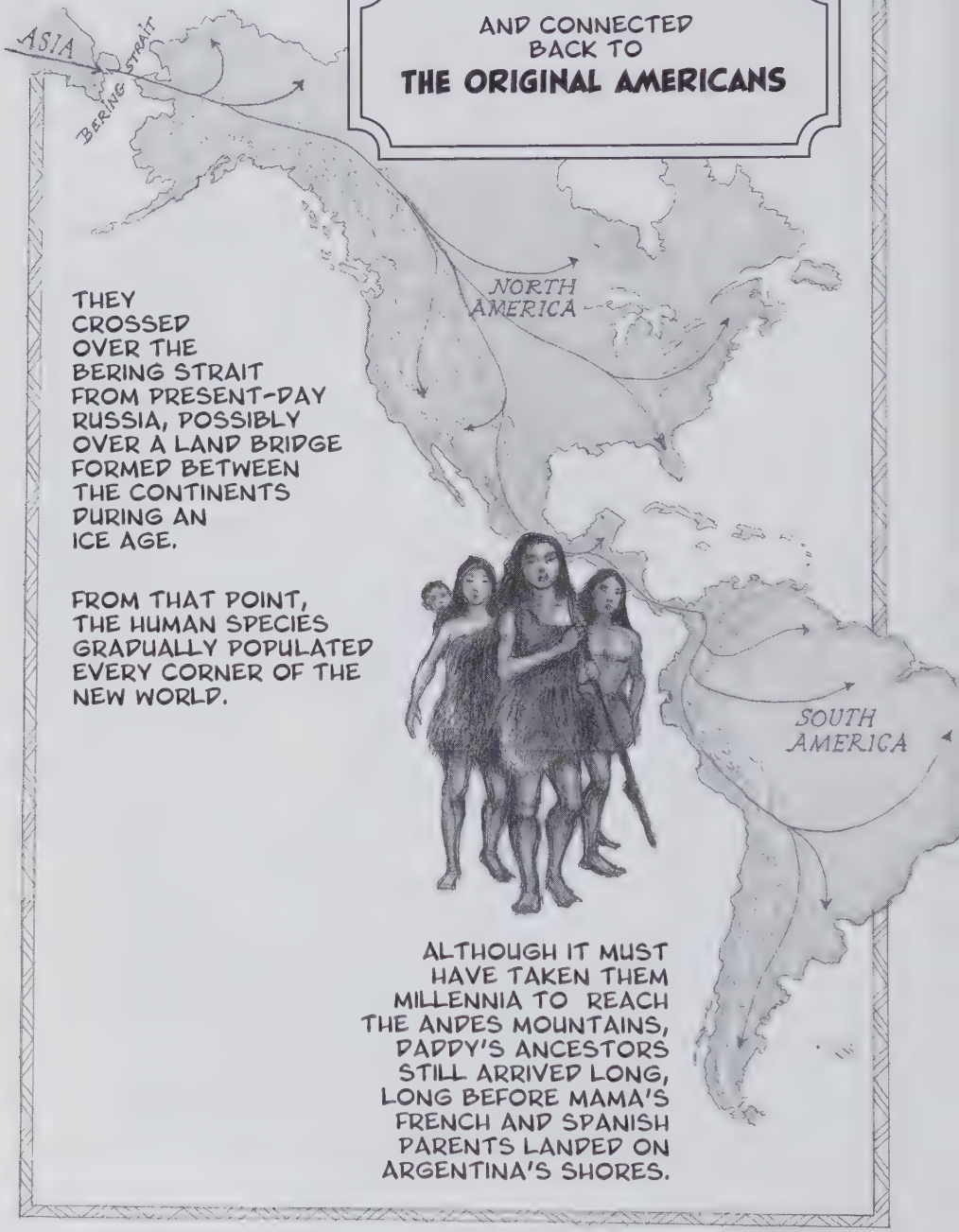
TRIGUEÑO IS A TERM DERIVED FROM *TRIGO*—SPANISH FOR WHEAT. IT APPLIES TO A PALETTE OF SKIN TONES BELONGING TO MIXED-RACE PEOPLE IN LATINO CULTURES.

MAMA, OFFICIALLY DEEMED WHITE, DEFIED SOCIAL CONVENTION BY MARRYING THIS *TRIGUEÑO*.

LIKE MOST BUENOS AIRES NATIVES, SHE CAME FROM PURE EUROPEAN STOCK.

DADDY'S ANCESTRAL LINE CONSISTED OF WANDERERS,

AND CONNECTED
BACK TO
THE ORIGINAL AMERICANS



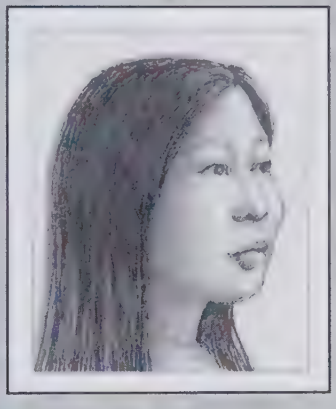
THEY CROSSED OVER THE BERING STRAIT FROM PRESENT-DAY RUSSIA, POSSIBLY OVER A LAND BRIDGE FORMED BETWEEN THE CONTINENTS DURING AN ICE AGE.

FROM THAT POINT, THE HUMAN SPECIES GRADUALLY POPULATED EVERY CORNER OF THE NEW WORLD.

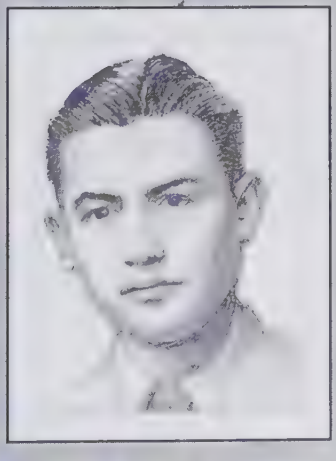
ALTHOUGH IT MUST HAVE TAKEN THEM MILLENNIA TO REACH THE ANDES MOUNTAINS, DADDY'S ANCESTORS STILL ARRIVED LONG, LONG BEFORE MAMA'S FRENCH AND SPANISH PARENTS LANDED ON ARGENTINA'S SHORES.

MY FATHER PROUDLY IDENTIFIED WITH NATIVE AMERICANS ACROSS THE SPECTRUM.

TRACES OF THEIR COMMON ANCESTORS LIVED ON IN HIM AND HIS OFFSPRING.

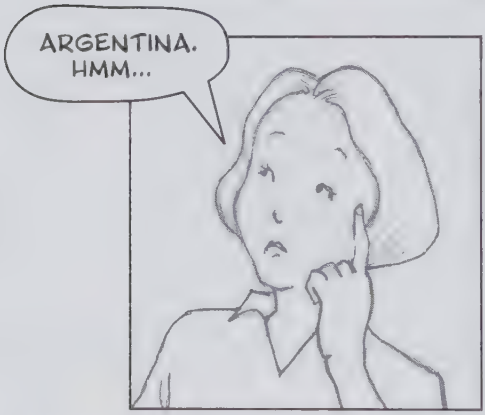


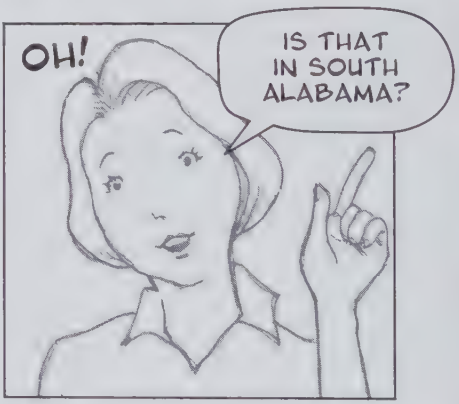
YOU COULD SEE IT IN THEIR EYELID FOLDS, IN THE TEXTURE OF THEIR HAIR, IN THEIR LIPS, IN THEIR SKIN TONES THAT RANGED FROM MAHOGANY TO WHEAT.



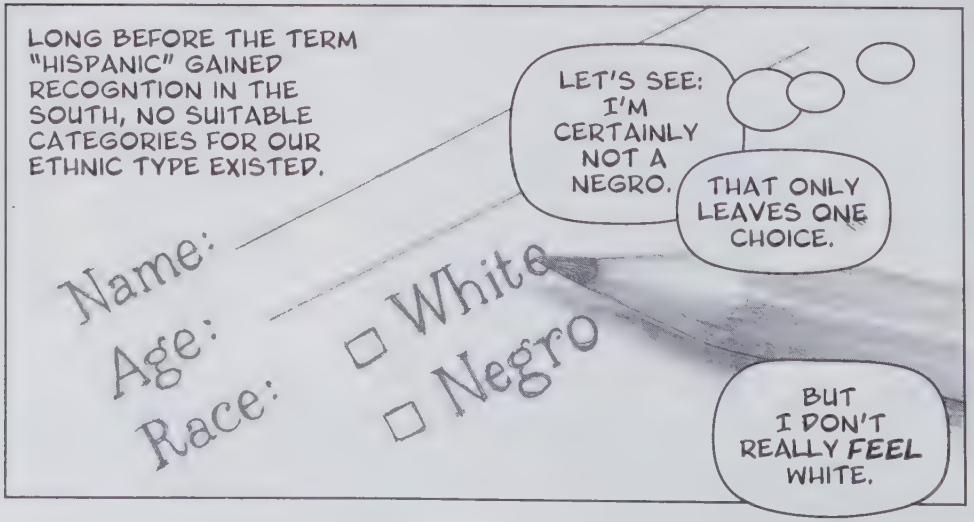
MOST SOUTHERNERS HAD NO IDEA HOW TO LABEL US. THEY TOOK IN OUR DARK FEATURES, HISPANIC OLIVE SKIN, AND FULL LIPS, AND IF THEIR MOUTHS DIDN'T ASK THE QUESTION, THEIR EYES DID:

EVEN OUR GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN DREW BLANK STARES.



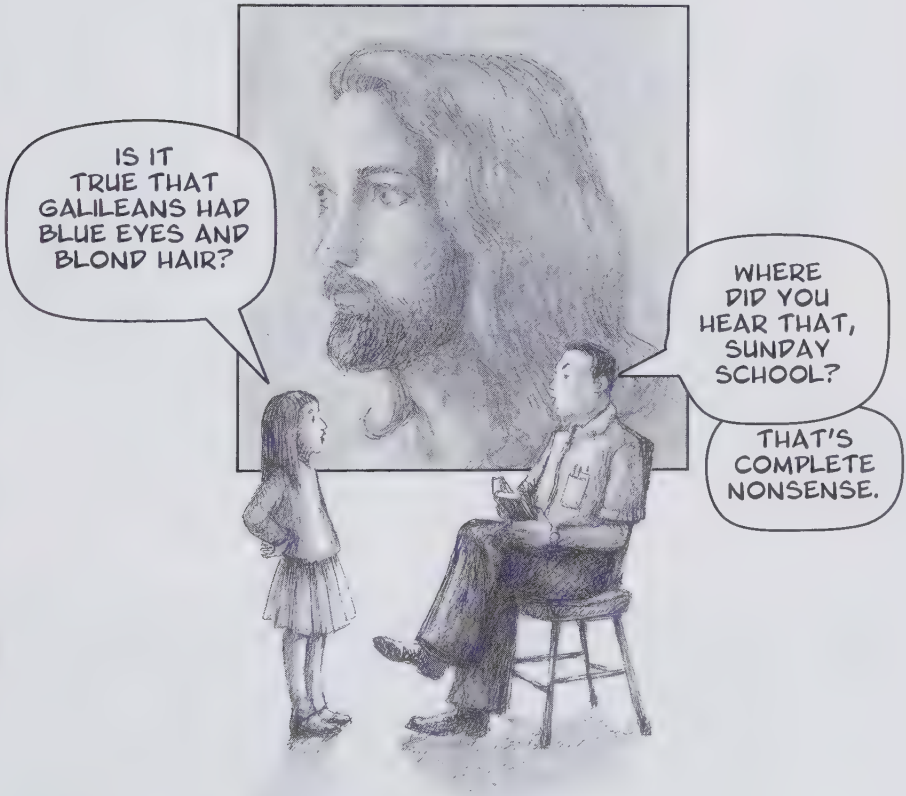


LONG BEFORE THE TERM "HISPANIC" GAINED RECOGNTION IN THE SOUTH, NO SUITABLE CATEGORIES FOR OUR ETHNIC TYPE EXISTED.



I GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT WHITENESS WAS A PRIVILEGE, IF YOU WANTED TO SEE IT AS SUCH, RESERVED FOR DESCENDANTS OF NORTHERN EUROPEANS.

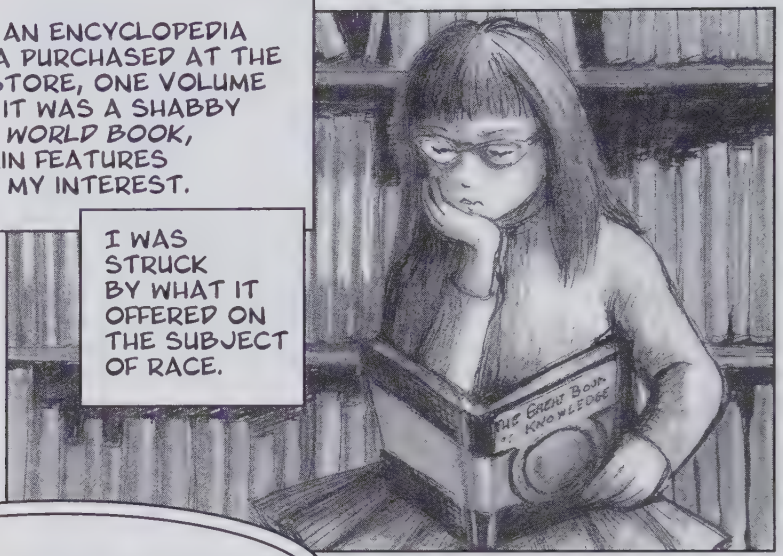
EVEN JESUS GOT DRAWN INTO THIS FOLD. BLUE-EYED PORTRAITS OF HIM WERE EVERYWHERE IN OUR BIBLE BELT STATE.

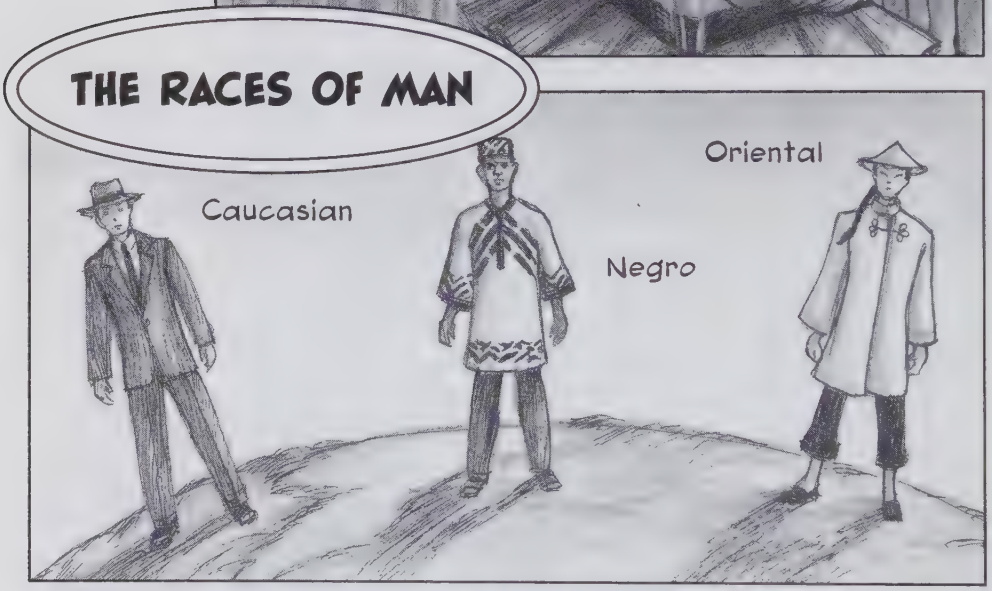


ACCORDING TO DADDY, JESUS WOULD'VE BEEN AS DARK-SKINNED AS AN ARAB, NOT THE MILKY WHITE WISHED ON HIM BY SOUTHERNERS.

WE OWNED AN ENCYCLOPEDIA THAT MAMA PURCHASED AT THE GROCERY STORE, ONE VOLUME AT A TIME. IT WAS A SHABBY COUSIN TO *WORLD BOOK*, BUT CERTAIN FEATURES CAPTURED MY INTEREST.

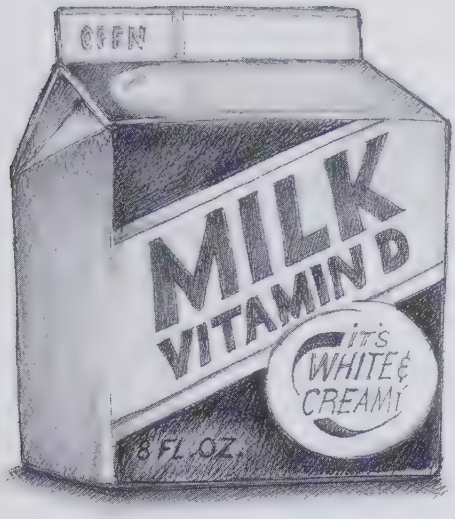
I WAS STRUCK BY WHAT IT OFFERED ON THE SUBJECT OF RACE.





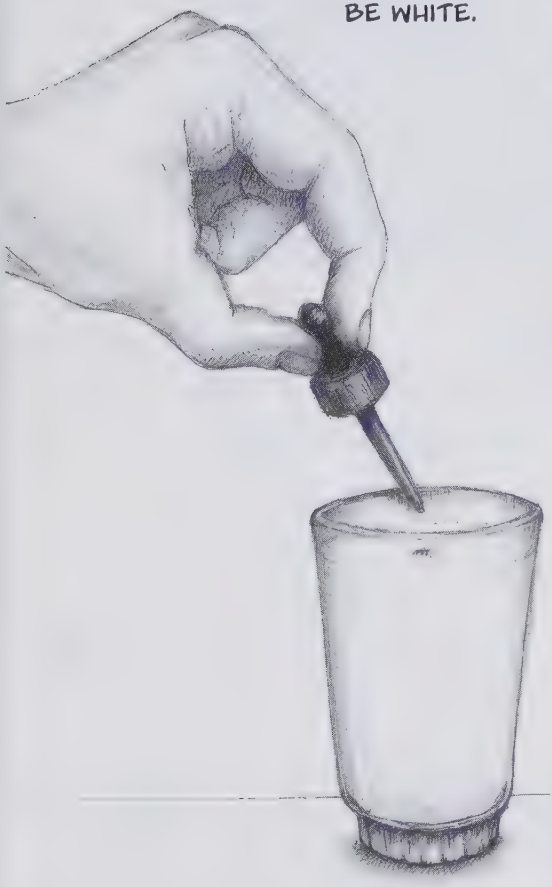
HERE, THE DIVIDING LINES BETWEEN ONE RACE AND THE NEXT WERE UNMISTAKABLE. HOW SIMPLE FOR SUCH PEOPLE TO KNOW EXACTLY ***WHAT*** THEY ARE...

...EVEN WHEN REALITY FAILS TO ACCOMMODATE THOSE NEAT CATEGORIES.



BUT FEW WHITE SOUTHERNERS TOLERATED RACIAL AMBIGUITY. THEY DISPENSED WITH SUCH FUZZY BOUNDARIES BY APPLYING ***THE ONE-DROP RULE.***

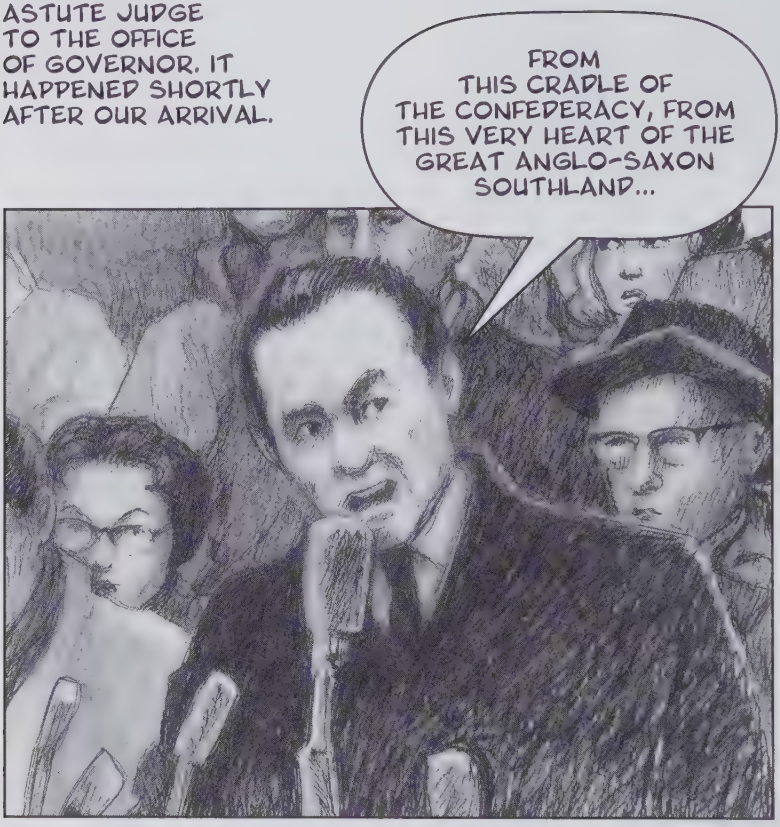
ACCORDING TO THE ONE-DROP RULE, NO ONE WHO HAS THE SLIGHTEST TRACE OF AFRICAN ANCESTRY CAN CLAIM TO BE WHITE.



THE RULE IS UNYIELDING. NO MATTER HOW HIGH A PROPORTION OF WHITE ANCESTRY A PERSON MAY HAVE, JUST ONE DROP OF BLACKNESS CANCELS IT OUT.

PURITY OF RACE IS PARAMOUNT.

WHITE ALABAMIANS' OBSESSION WITH KEEPING THE RACES APART PROPELLED A POLITICALLY ASTUTE JUDGE TO THE OFFICE OF GOVERNOR. IT HAPPENED SHORTLY AFTER OUR ARRIVAL.



...I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever.

—Gov. George C. Wallace
January 14, 1963

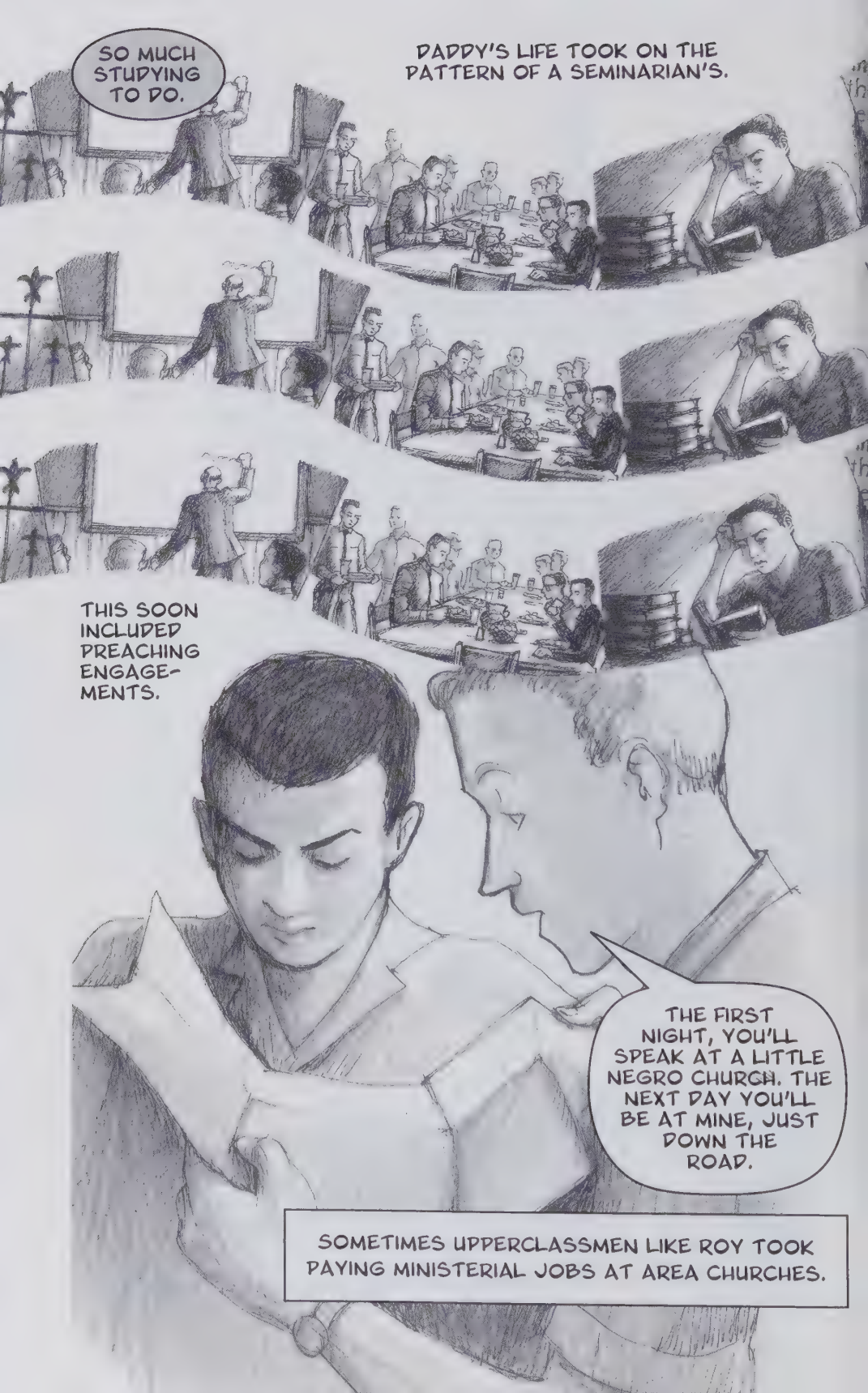
chapter 6

AN AMERICAN EDUCATION

IT WAS 1948
WHEN DADDY LANDED
IN NEW ORLEANS
FOR THE PURPOSE
OF ENROLLING
IN SEMINARY.

I WONDER ABOUT HIS FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF AMERICA.

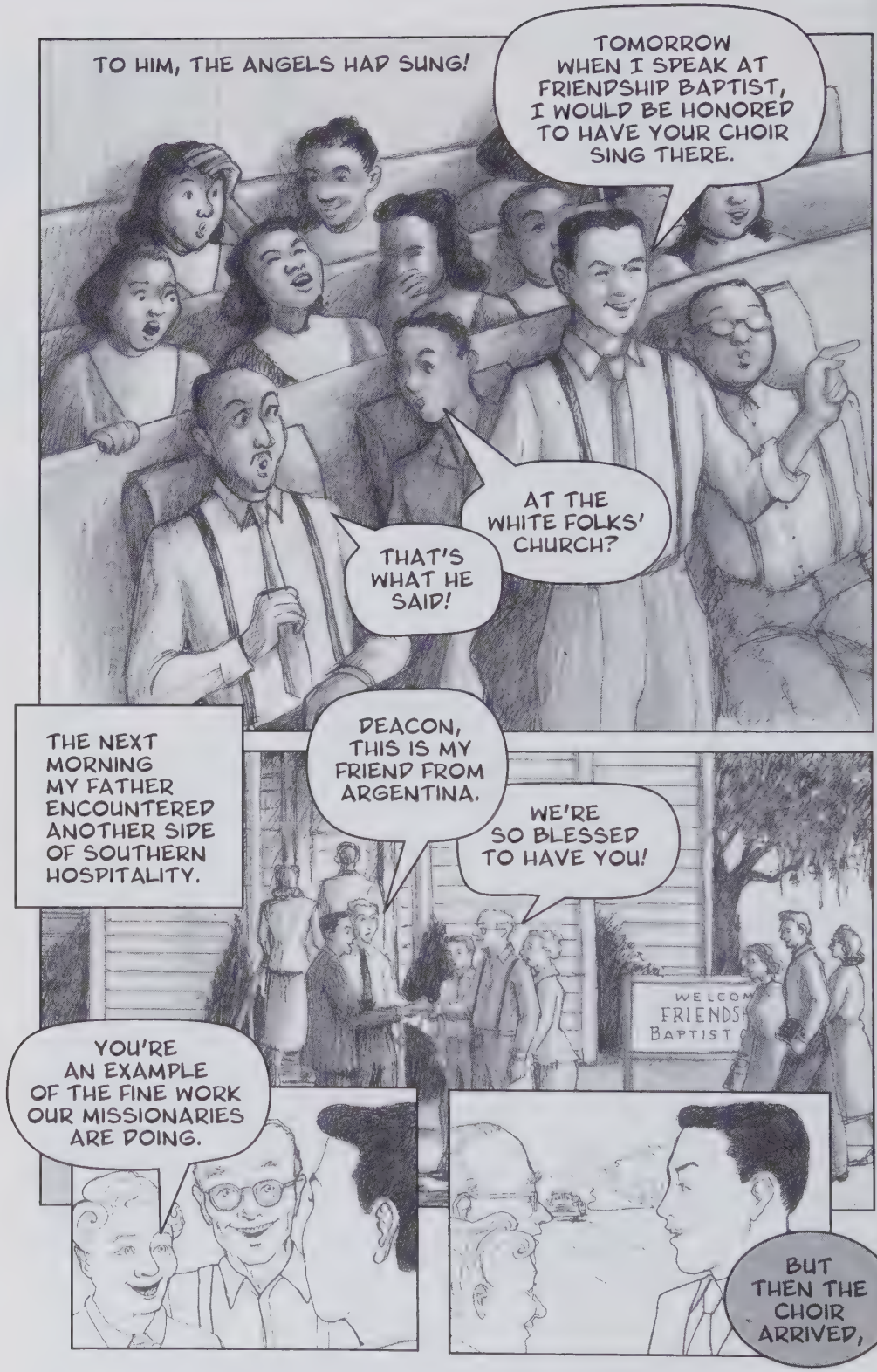
SO MANY PROTESTANT CHURCHES!
SALE
SALE
SO MUCH ABUNDANCE.
SO MANY CONTRADICTIONS.
COLORED

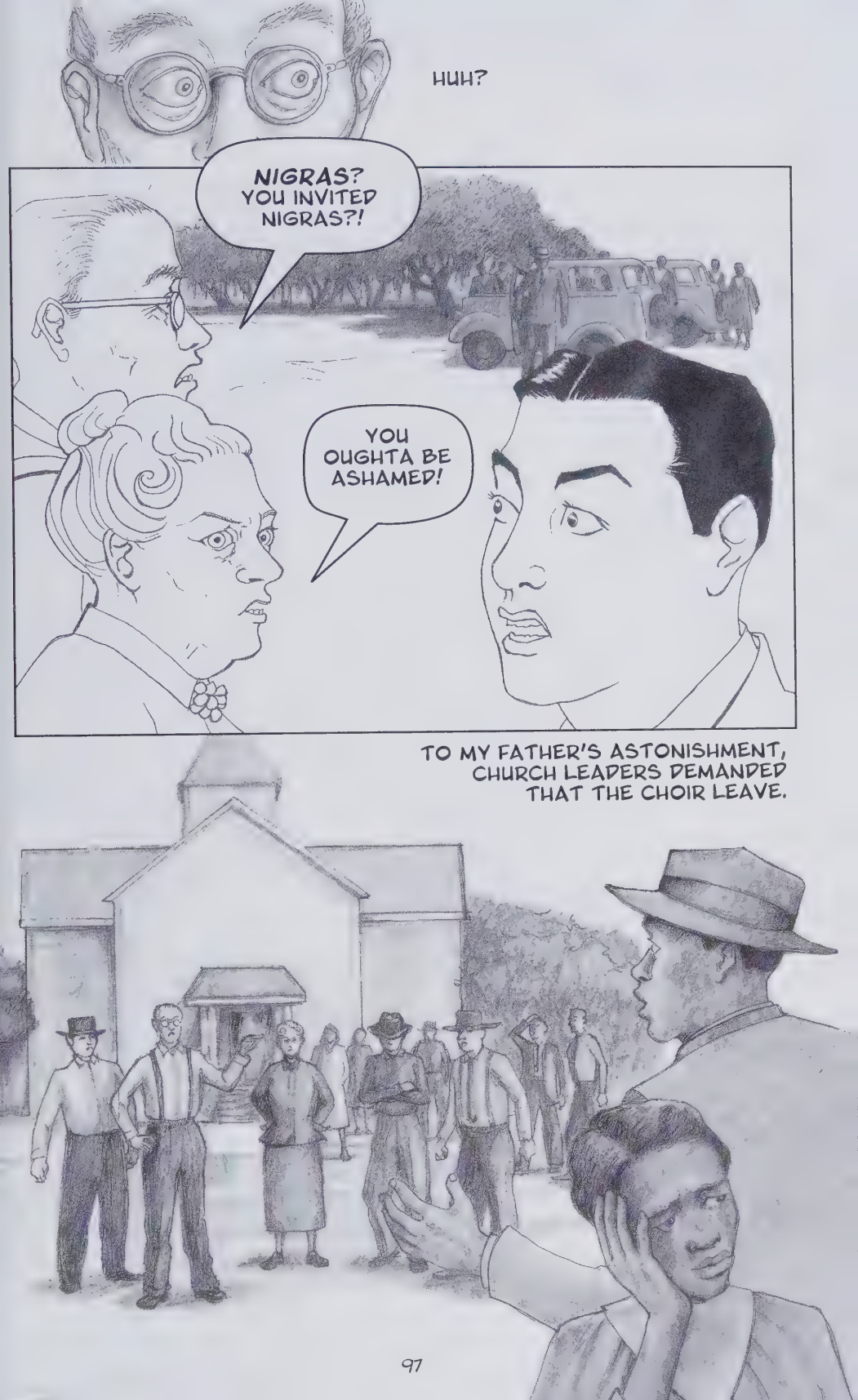

SO MUCH STUDYING TO DO.
DADDY'S LIFE TOOK ON THE PATTERN OF A SEMINARIAN'S.
THIS SOON INCLUDED PREACHING ENGAGE-MENTS.
THE FIRST NIGHT, YOU'LL SPEAK AT A LITTLE NEGRO CHURCH. THE NEXT DAY YOU'LL BE AT MINE, JUST DOWN THE ROAD.
SOMETIMES UPPERCLASSMEN LIKE ROY TOOK PAYING MINISTERIAL JOBS AT AREA CHURCHES.

ON A SATURDAY NIGHT, SOMEWHERE IN RURAL LOUISIANA:

'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
and Grace will lead me home.

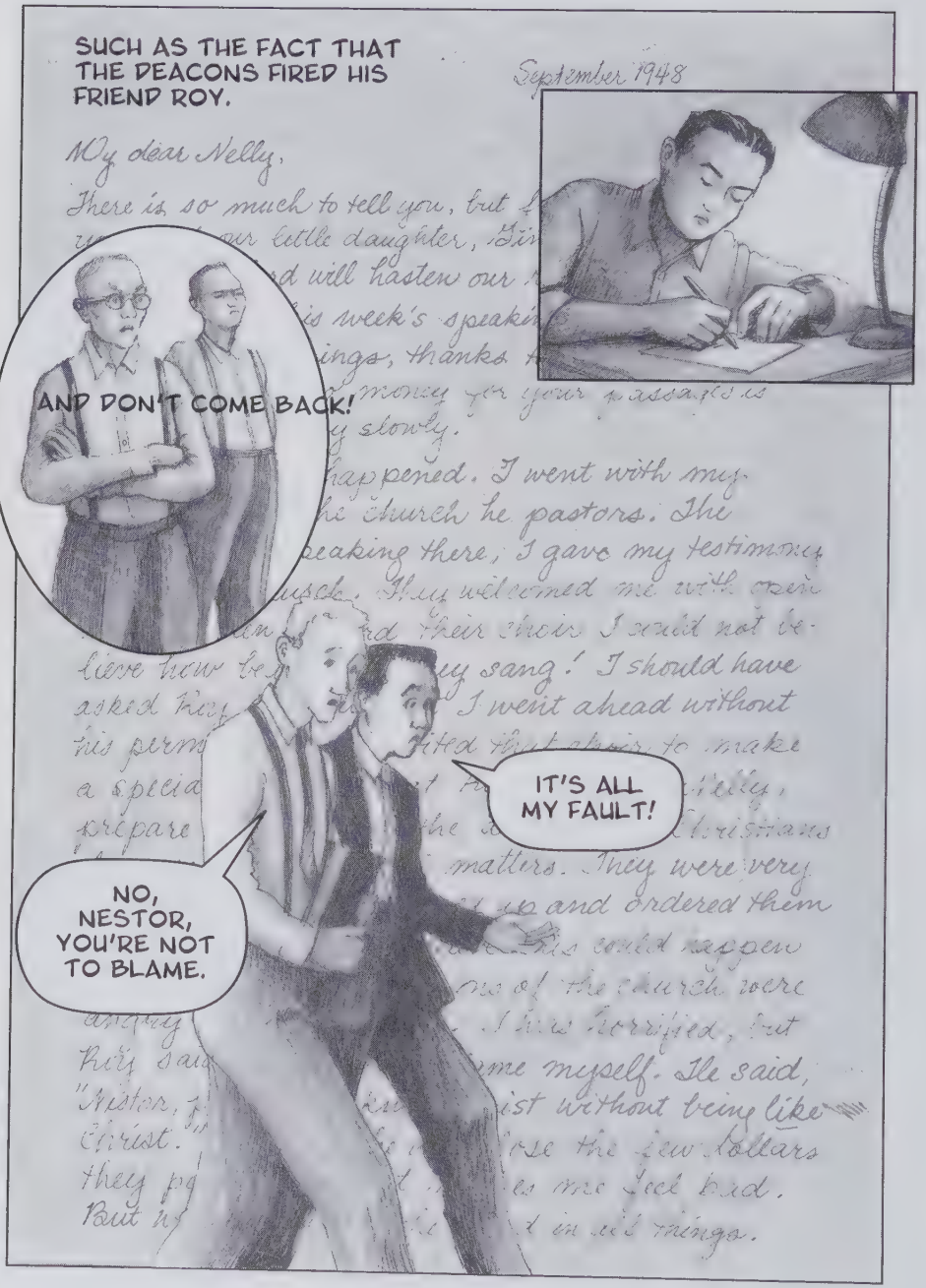
THIS WAS UNLIKE ANYTHING MY FATHER HAD EVER HEARD.


TO HIM, THE ANGELS HAD SUNG!
TOMORROW WHEN I SPEAK AT FRIENDSHIP BAPTIST, I WOULD BE HONORED TO HAVE YOUR CHOIR SING THERE.
AT THE WHITE FOLKS' CHURCH?
THAT'S WHAT HE SAID!
THE NEXT MORNING MY FATHER ENCOUNTERED ANOTHER SIDE OF SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY.
DEACON, THIS IS MY FRIEND FROM ARGENTINA.
WE'RE SO BLESSED TO HAVE YOU!
YOU'RE AN EXAMPLE OF THE FINE WORK OUR MISSIONARIES ARE DOING.
BUT THEN THE CHOIR ARRIVED,
AND THINGS TOOK AN UGLY TURN.



TO MY FATHER'S ASTONISHMENT, CHURCH LEADERS DEMANDED THAT THE CHOIR LEAVE.

I IMAGINE THAT HIS NEXT LETTER HOME MUST'VE CONTAINED SOMETHING ABOUT THIS INCIDENT.


SUCH AS THE FACT THAT THE DEACONS FIRED HIS FRIEND ROY.

September 1948

My dear Nelly,

There is so much to tell you, but

our little daughter, Gi

d will hasten our

is week's speaki

ings, thanks

money for your passages is

y slowly.

happened. I went with my

he church he pastors. The

peaking there, I gave my testimony

usch. They welcomed me with open

rd their choir I could not be-

lieve how be ey sang! I should have

asked Roy I went ahead without

his perm ited that choir to make

a specia Nelly,

prepare the Christians

matters. They were very

up and ordered them

his could happen

ns of the church were

I was horrified, but

Roy sai me myself. He said,

"Nestor, ist without being like

Christ." se the few dollars

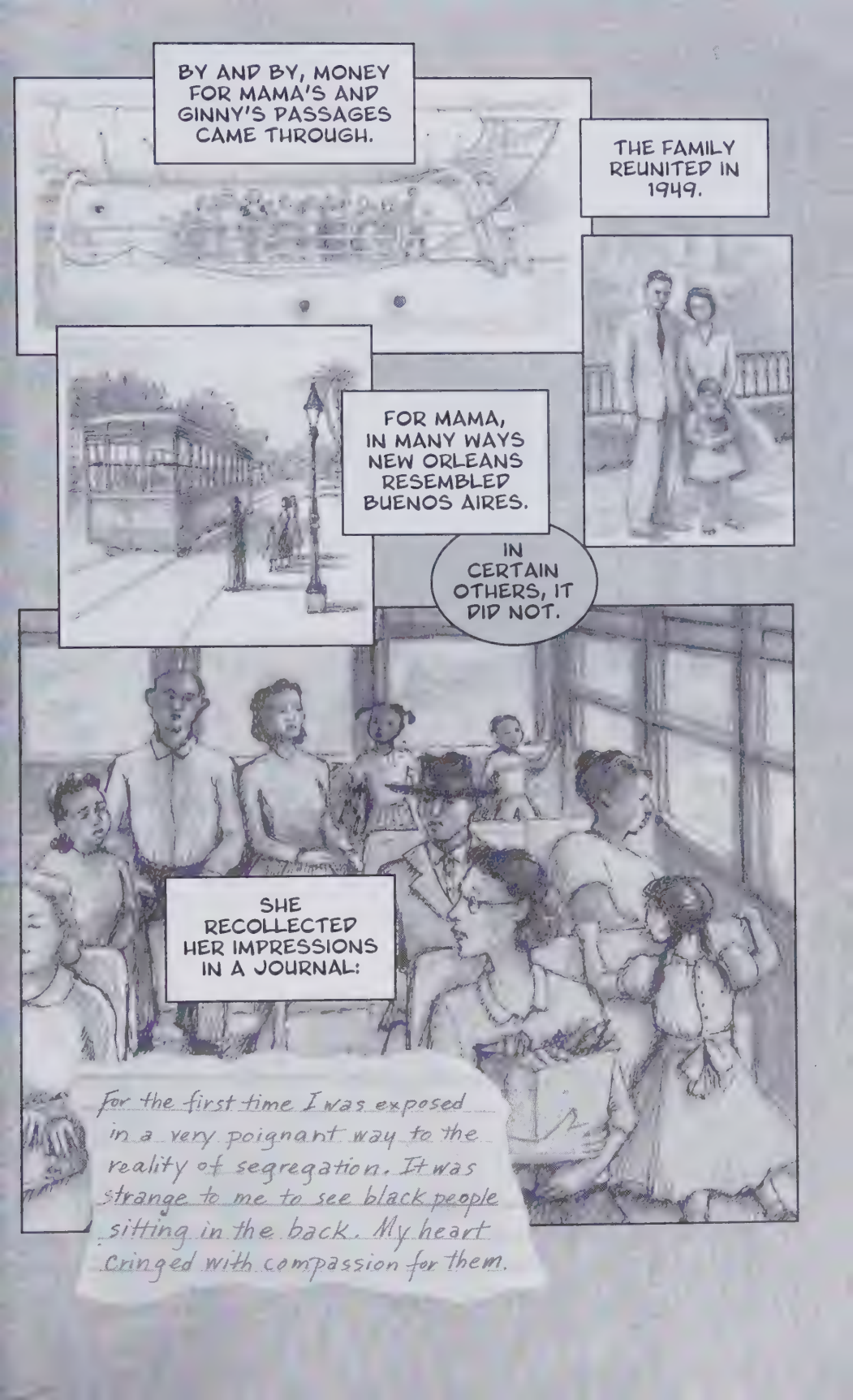
they p es me feel bad.

But w d in all things.

AND DON'T COME BACK!

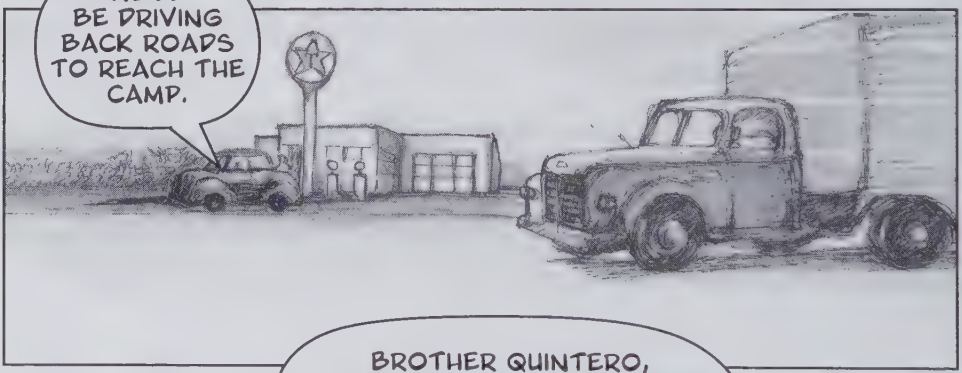
IT'S ALL MY FAULT!

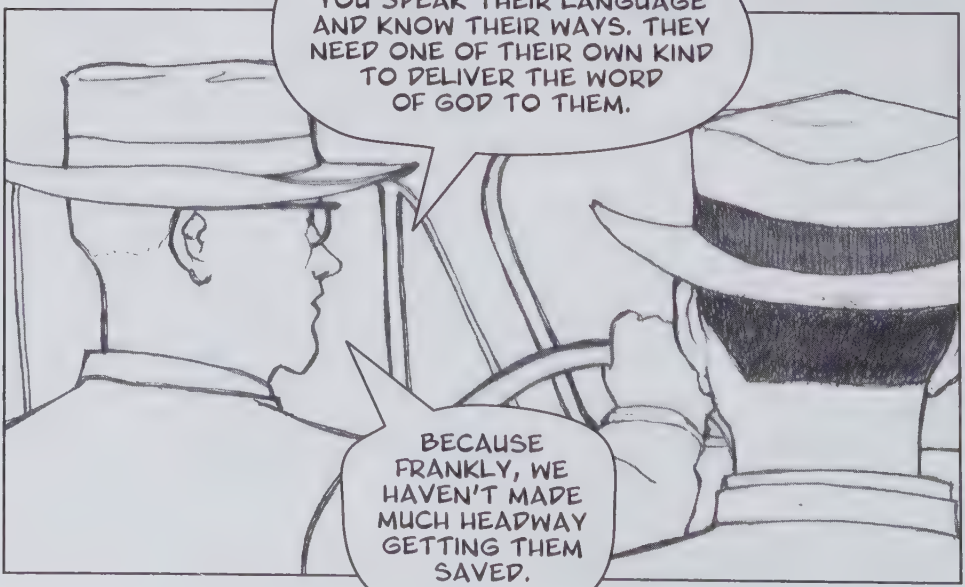
NO, NESTOR, YOU'RE NOT TO BLAME.


BY AND BY, MONEY FOR MAMA'S AND GINNY'S PASSAGES CAME THROUGH.
THE FAMILY REUNITED IN 1949.
FOR MAMA, IN MANY WAYS NEW ORLEANS RESEMBLED BUENOS AIRES.
IN CERTAIN OTHERS, IT DID NOT.
SHE RECOLLECTED HER IMPRESSIONS IN A JOURNAL:
For the first time I was exposed in a very poignant way to the reality of segregation. It was strange to me to see black people sitting in the back. My heart cringed with compassion for them.

AS DADDY'S GRADUATION NEARED, HE RECEIVED A JOB OFFER FROM A TEXAS CHURCH.

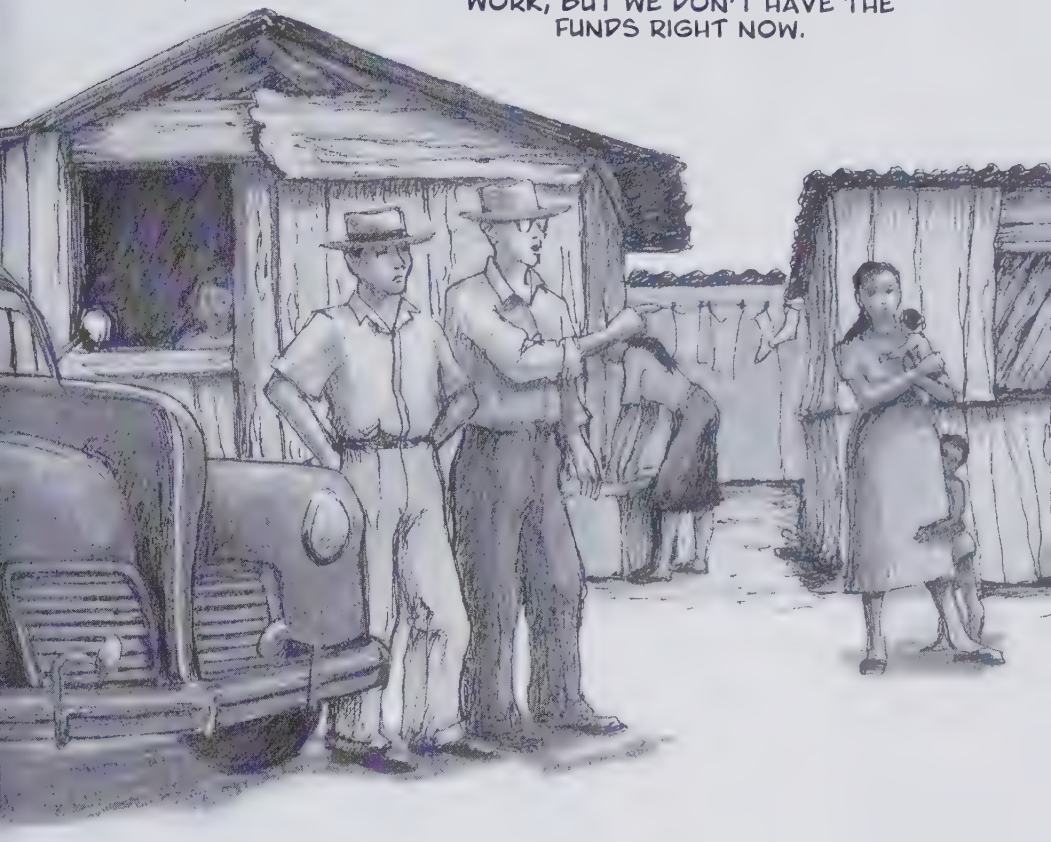
INITIALLY, THE POSITION SEEMED IDEAL: DIRECTOR OF A MISSION TO SPANISH SPEAKERS, POSSIBLY MIGRANT WORKERS.





THERE WAS A CERTAIN RING TO THE MAN'S WORDS.

DOWN THE WAY IS YOUR LIVING QUARTERS. YOUR WIFE WILL WANT TO FIX IT UP A BIT. ACTUALLY, THE WHOLE PLACE NEEDS WORK, BUT WE DON'T HAVE THE FUNDS RIGHT NOW.



BUT SINCE YOU WERE A HOMELESS ORPHAN, YOU MUST BE USED TO THE LACK OF INDOOR PLUMBING AND ELECTRICITY.

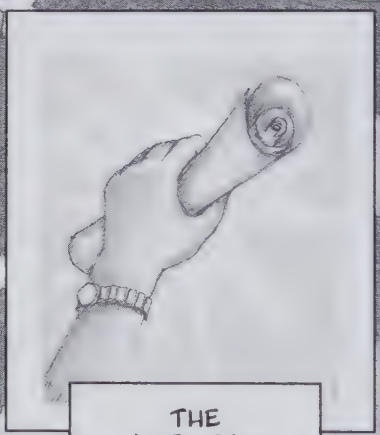
LISTEN, THE CHURCH FIGURES YOU'RE PERFECT FOR THIS JOB IN EVERY SENSE. WHAT DO YOU SAY?

I SEE NOW WHY I'M "PERFECT FOR THE JOB."
I'M A FOREIGNER, SO I SHOULDN'T MIND LIVING IN SUCH CONDIITONS?
BUT, I THOUGHT...
YOU'RE WONDERING WHY YOU'VE HAD SO FEW CONVERTS IN THIS MISSION? LOOK AROUND, MISTER.
YOU WOULDN'T BRING YOUR PET DOG TO LIVE IN THIS SQUALOR!
ONE DOOR CLOSED, ANOTHER OPENED.

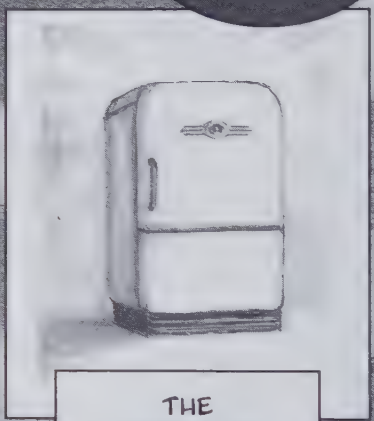
INSTEAD, THE FAMILY WENT TO ALABAMA, WHERE THERE WERE SO FEW HISPANICS THAT SLURS AGAINST PEOPLE LIKE US HADN'T ENTERED THE LEXICON YET.
DADDY TOOK A POSITION AS ASSISTANT PASTOR OF A BIRMINGHAM-AREA CHURCH.
THESE BIRMINGHAM HILLS!
ALABAMA
SOON MAMA WAS PREGNANT WITH LISSY, WHO BECAME THE ONLY FAMILY MEMBER BORN IN THE UNITED STATES.
BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

1954:
THE TIME HAD COME TO PACK UP THE AMERICAN DREAM AND RETURN TO ARGENTINA.

THE AMERICAN DAUGHTER!

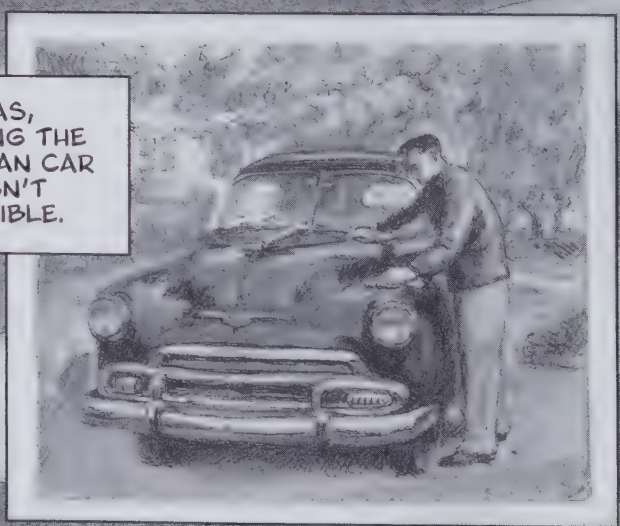


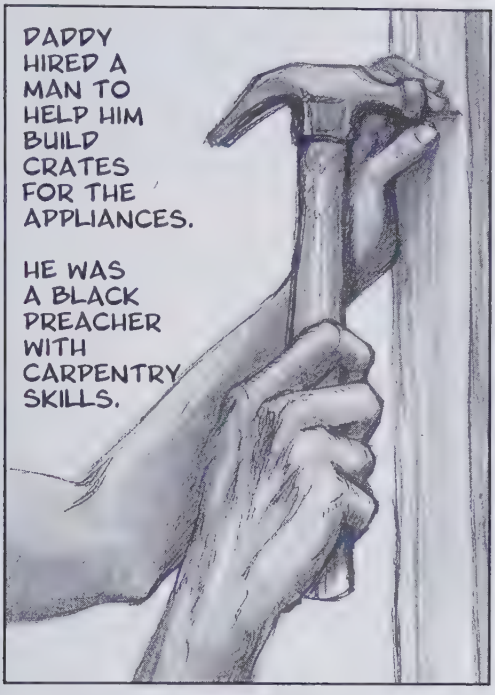
THE AMERICAN EDUCATION!

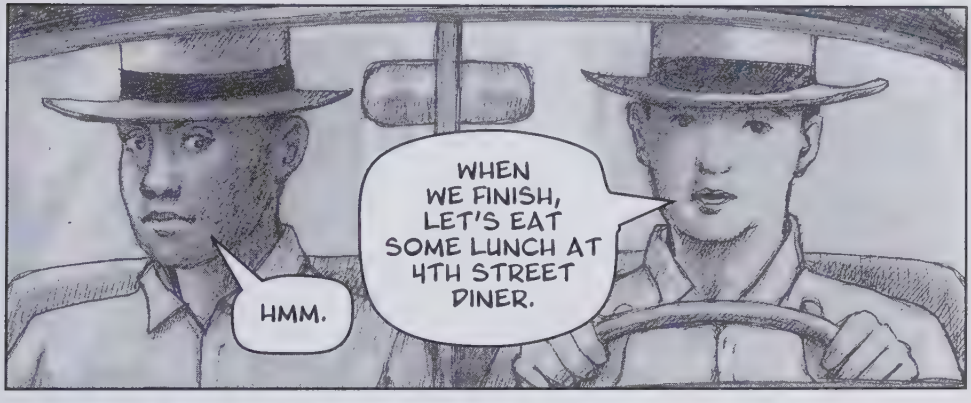


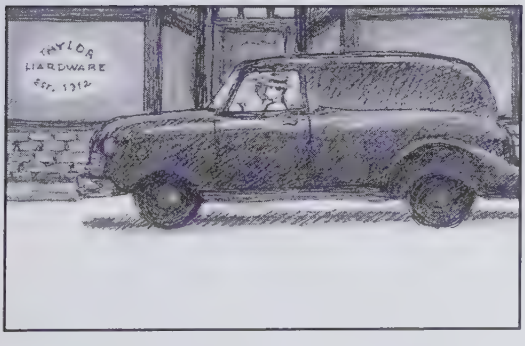
THE AMERICAN APPLIANCES!

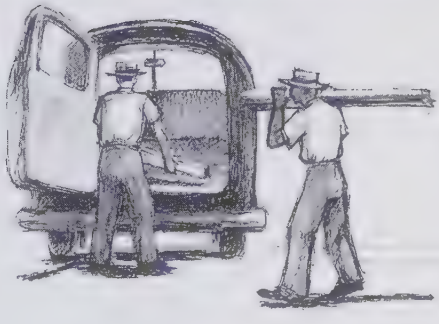
ALAS, SHIPPING THE AMERICAN CAR WASN'T POSSIBLE.











BY NOW, SIX YEARS HAD PASSED SINCE DADDY'S UNHAPPY INITIATION TO THE SOUTH'S RACIAL CODE. HE WAS NO LONGER NAIVE.

WHEN HE DEFIED THE RULES, IT WOULD'VE BEEN INTENTIONAL.

INSIDE THE "COLORED" DINER:
HA, HA! YOU WON'T BELIEVE THIS, POP. THERE'S A WHITE MAN JUST COME IN HERE TO EAT.
RECKON HE'S BLIND LIKE ME AND CAN'T READ THE SIGNS?

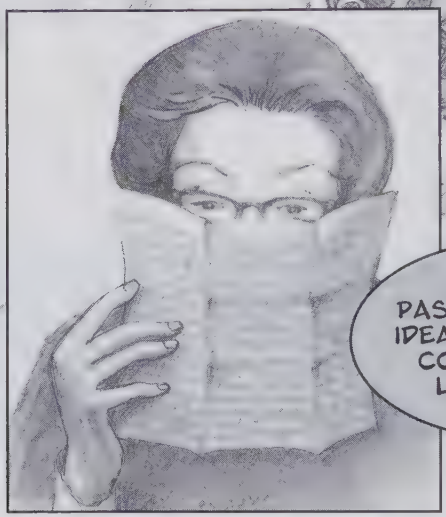
chapter 7

DEAR ARGENTINA

LETTERS POSTMARKED BUENOS AIRES ARRIVED EVERY FEW WEEKS.

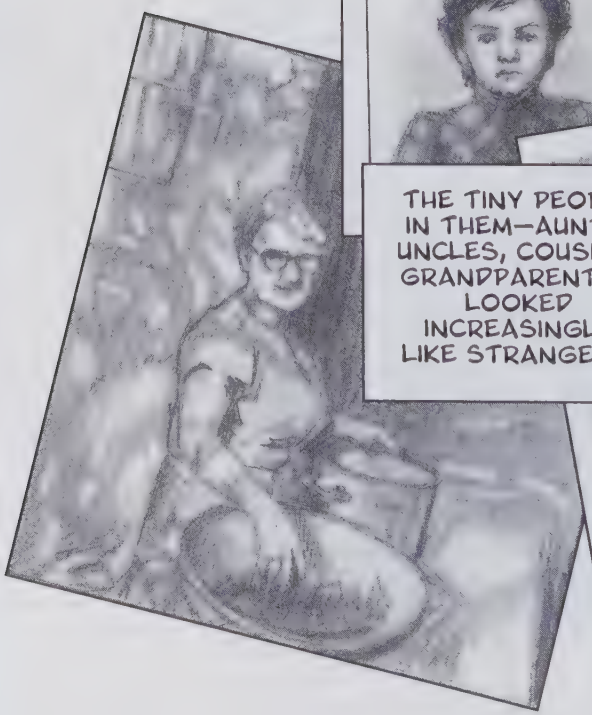
THEY FORMED A SLENDER TETHER TO THE OLD COUNTRY.

1964



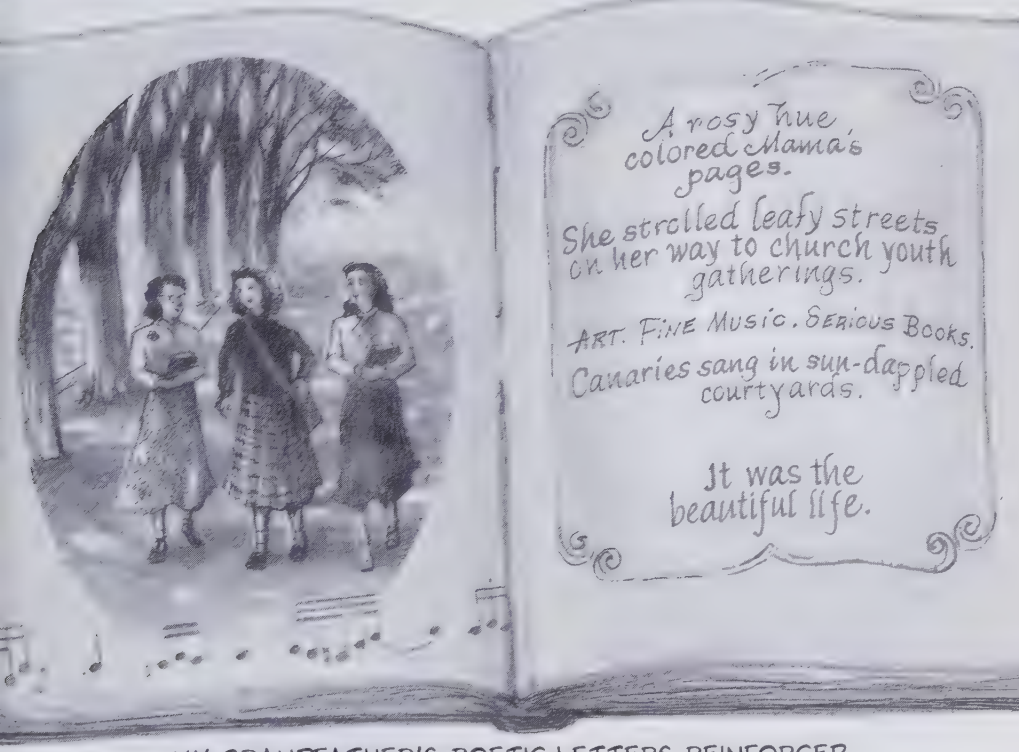
WITH EACH PASSING YEAR, MY IDEA OF ARGENTINA CONTRACTED A LITTLE MORE.

IT WAS DOWN TO THE WORDS OF MY GRANDFATHER AND THE PHOTOS THAT CAME WITH HIS LETTERS.



THE TINY PEOPLE IN THEM—AUNTS, UNCLES, COUSINS, GRANDPARENTS—LOOKED INCREASINGLY LIKE STRANGERS.

MAMA'S AND DADDY'S STORIES ABOUT THE OLD COUNTRY TOOK ON THE FEEL OF FAIRY TALES ON YELLOWED PAPER.



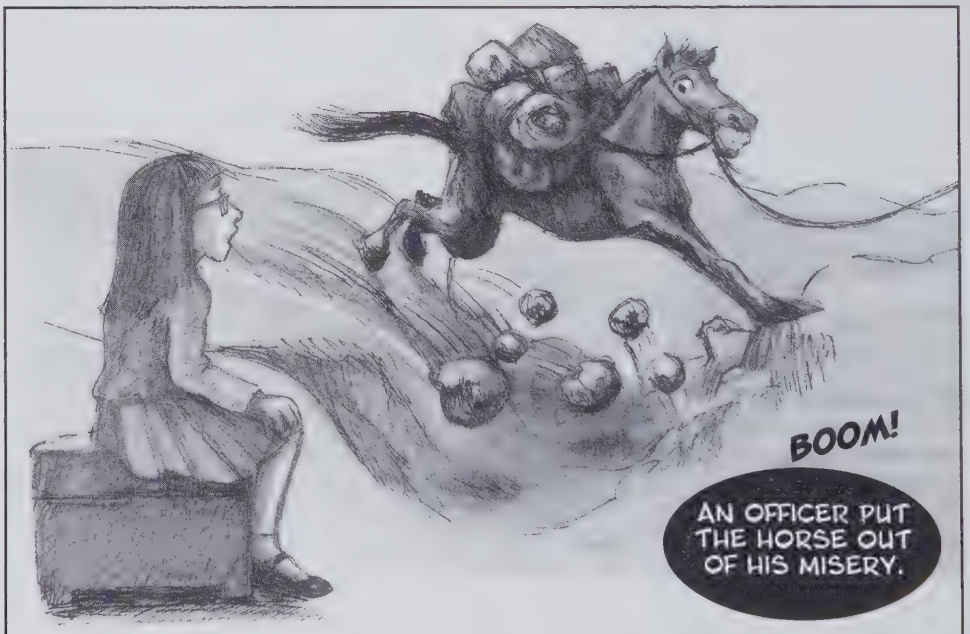
MY GRANDFATHER'S POETIC LETTERS REINFORCED THIS IMPRESSION OF ARGENTINA.

DADDY'S STINT IN THE CAVALRY PROVIDED AN INTRODUCTION TO ARGENTINA'S REGIMENTED SIDE.

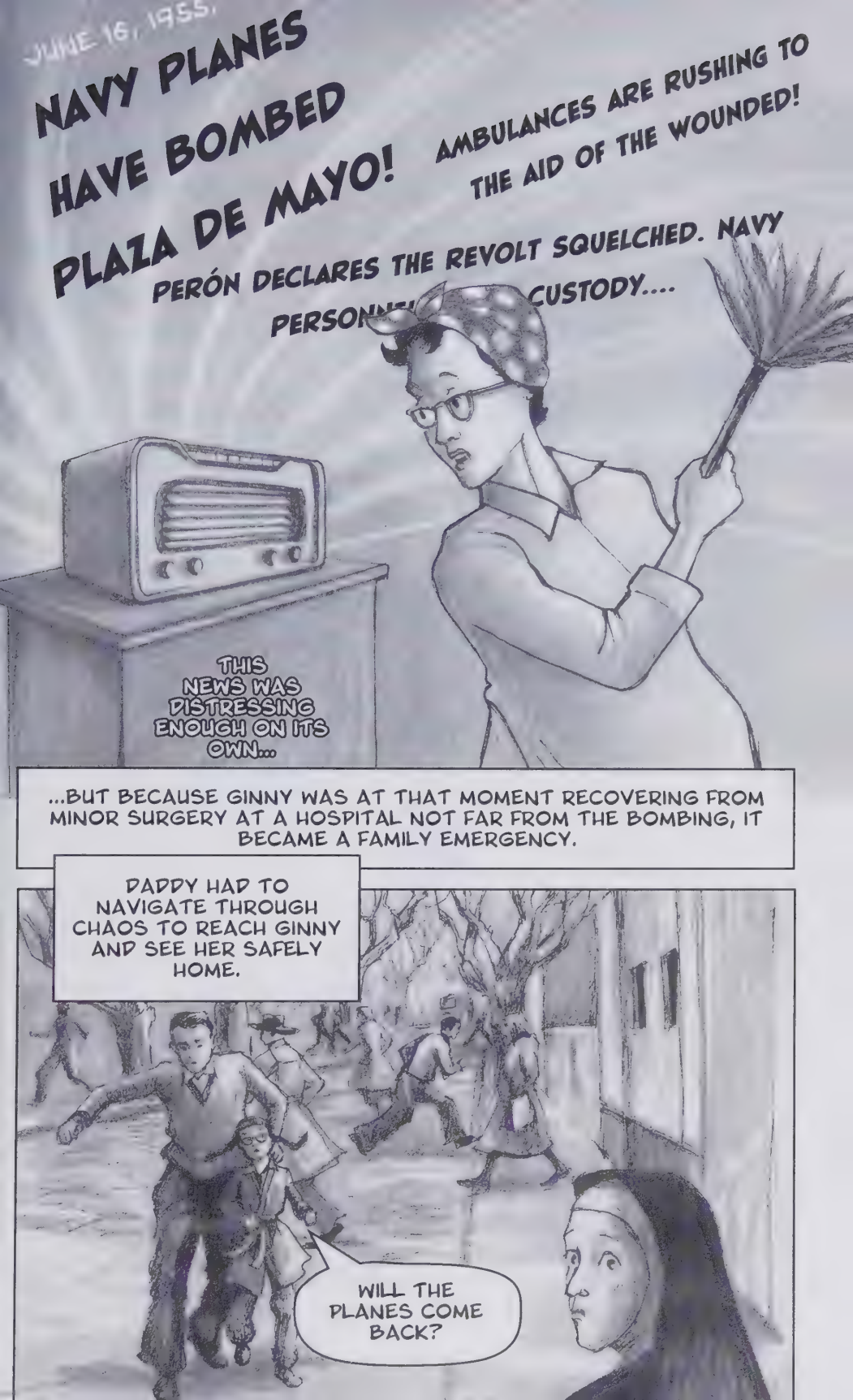
THAT'S WHEN HE LEARNED TO DO HANDSTANDS ON HORSEBACK.

HE HAD PHOTOGRAPHIC PROOF.

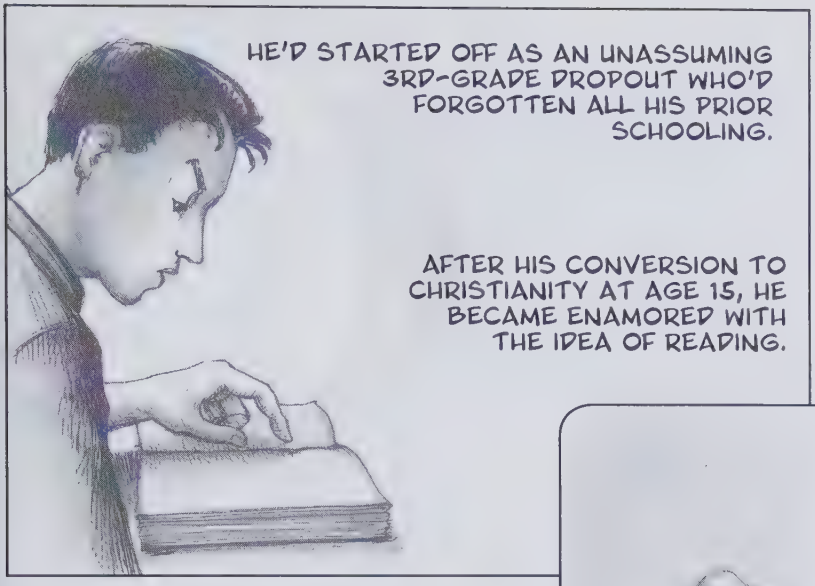
THEN THERE WAS HIS HORRIFYING ACCOUNT OF AN OVERLOADED PACKHORSE WHOSE SPINE SNAPPED WHILE CROSSING A RAVINE.

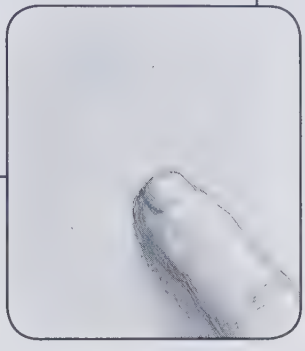


THE MILITARY WAS AN EVER-PRESENT FACT OF ARGENTINE HISTORY, AND POLITICS MOSTLY PLAYED IN THE BACKGROUND OF MY FAMILY'S SAGA, BUT NOW AND THEN THINGS GOT LOUD AND PERSONAL.

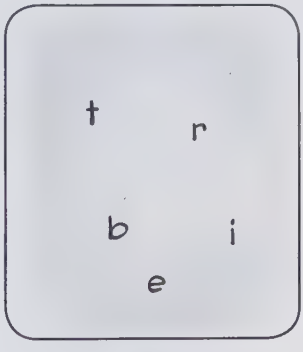

JUNE 16, 1955.
NAVY PLANES HAVE BOMBED PLAZA DE MAYO!
AMBULANCES ARE RUSHING TO THE AID OF THE WOUNDED!
PERÓN DECLARES THE REVOLT SQUELCHED. NAVY
CUSTODY....
THIS NEWS WAS DISTRESSING ENOUGH ON ITS OWN...
...BUT BECAUSE GINNY WAS AT THAT MOMENT RECOVERING FROM MINOR SURGERY AT A HOSPITAL NOT FAR FROM THE BOMBING, IT BECAME A FAMILY EMERGENCY.
DADDY HAD TO NAVIGATE THROUGH CHAOS TO REACH GINNY AND SEE HER SAFELY HOME.
WILL THE PLANES COME BACK?

IN 1950S ARGENTINA, EVEN ROUTINE LIFE WOULD LEAVE GINNY WITH A BITTER TASTE.
WHY DO YOU REFUSE TO ATTEND MASS WITH THE OTHER STUDENTS?
BUT MAESTRA, MY FAMILY ISN'T CATHOLIC!
MY, MY. AREN'T WE SUPERIOR? SO THIS IS WHAT COMES FROM LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES.
DURING THE SAME PERIOD, MY FATHER RAN INTO A NEARLY IDENTICAL BARRIER.
HE'D MADE HIMSELF UNHIREABLE BY BECOMING TOO EDUCATED— "UPPITY" IS WHAT SOME OF THE MISSIONARIES CALLED HIM.





BUT THE MARKS ON A PAGE WERE NUMBING MYSTERIES.

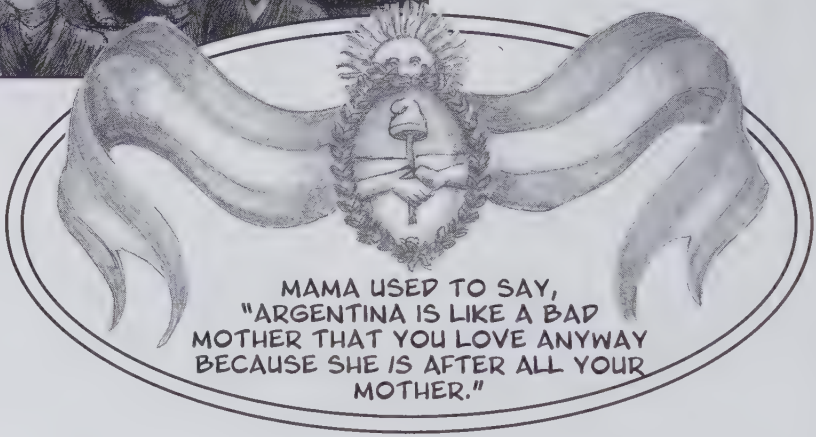


HE LABORED OVER THEM, PUZZLING OVER PATTERNS, UNTIL GRADUALLY...

...EUREKA! THEY FORMED WORDS.

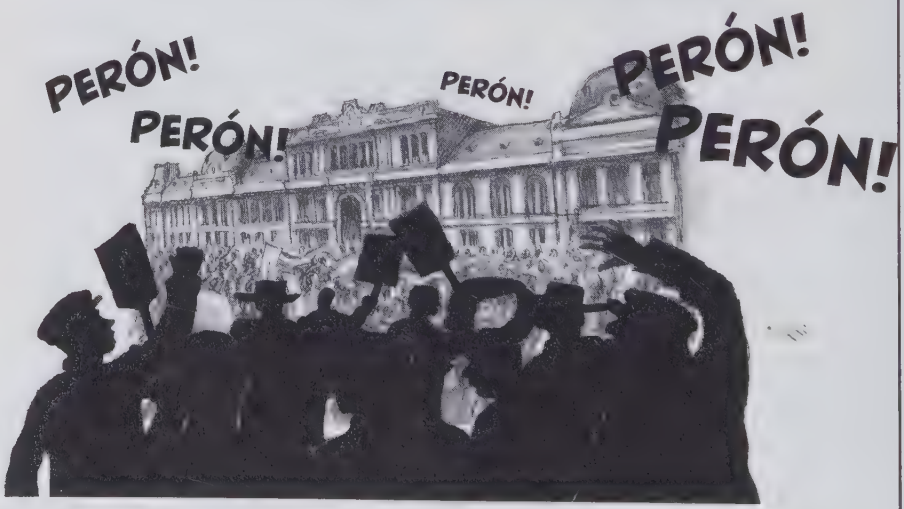
EVENTUALLY, HE FOUND A CHURCH THAT DIDN'T MIND A PASTOR WITH SCHOLARLY INTERESTS. THOSE WERE GOOD YEARS.

BUT THE PICTURE NEVER CEASED TO BE COMPLICATED.

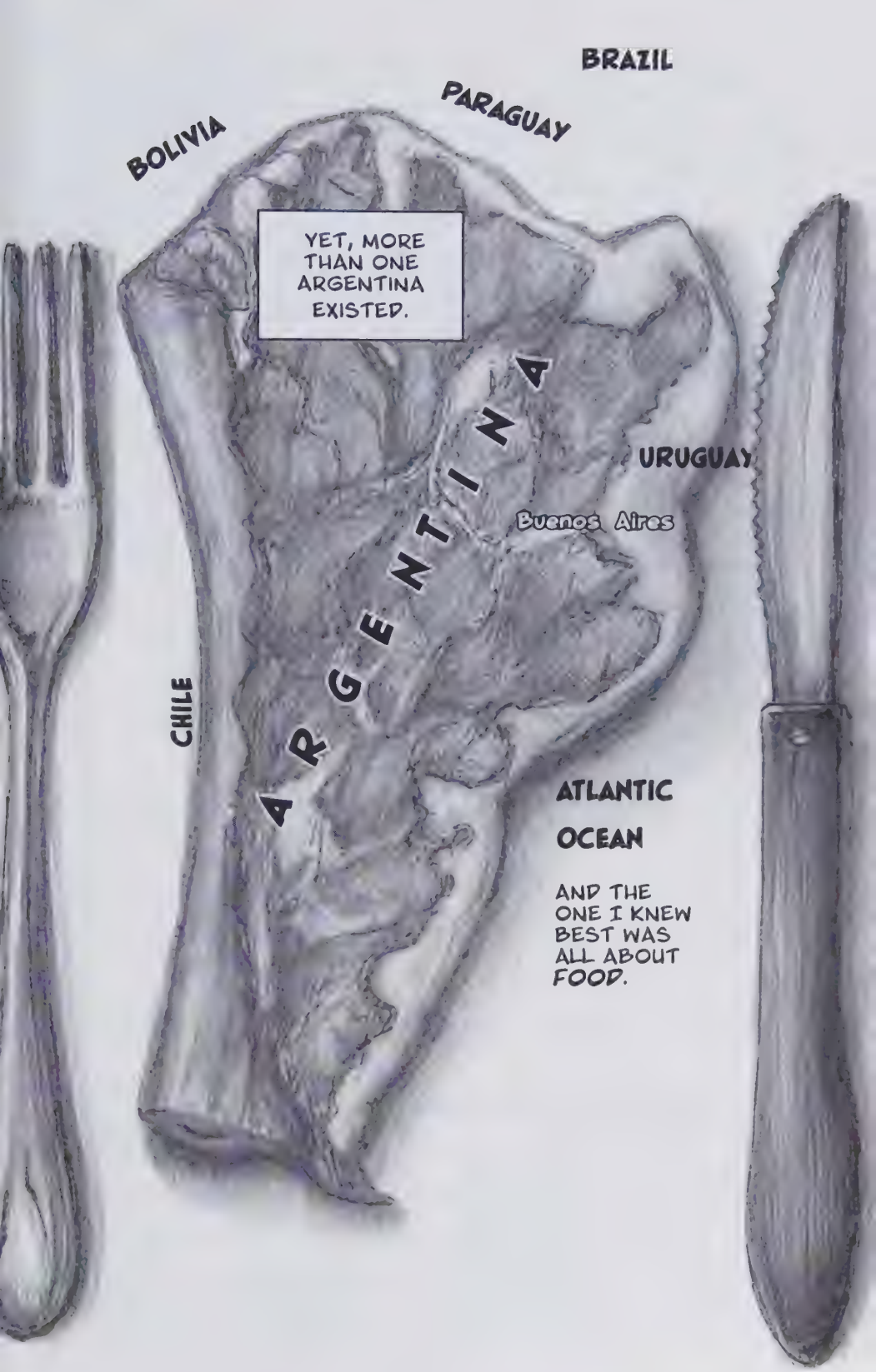


MAMA USED TO SAY, "ARGENTINA IS LIKE A BAD MOTHER THAT YOU LOVE ANYWAY BECAUSE SHE IS AFTER ALL YOUR MOTHER."

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORK AND EDUCATION, TOGETHER WITH RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL OPPRESSION,



I UNDERSTOOD WHICH ARGENTINA SHE MEANT.


BRAZIL
PARAGUAY
BOLIVIA
YET, MORE THAN ONE ARGENTINA EXISTED.
URUGUAY
Buenos Aires
ARGENTINA
CHILE
ATLANTIC OCEAN
AND THE ONE I KNEW BEST WAS ALL ABOUT FOOD.

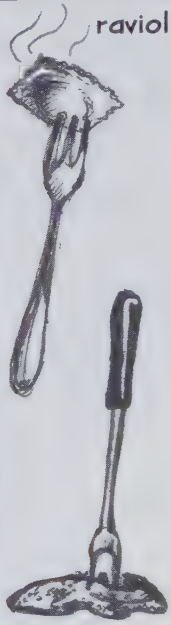
ARGENTINE SPECIALTIES

AS PERFECTED IN ALABAMA BY MY MOTHER.

empanadas

pan francés

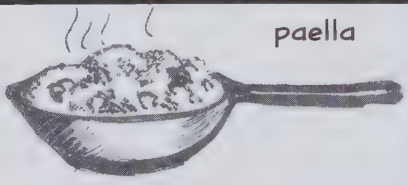
ravioli



milanesas *

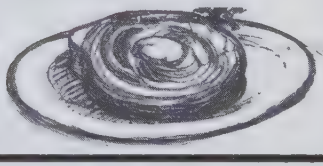
dulce de leche

medialunas



paella

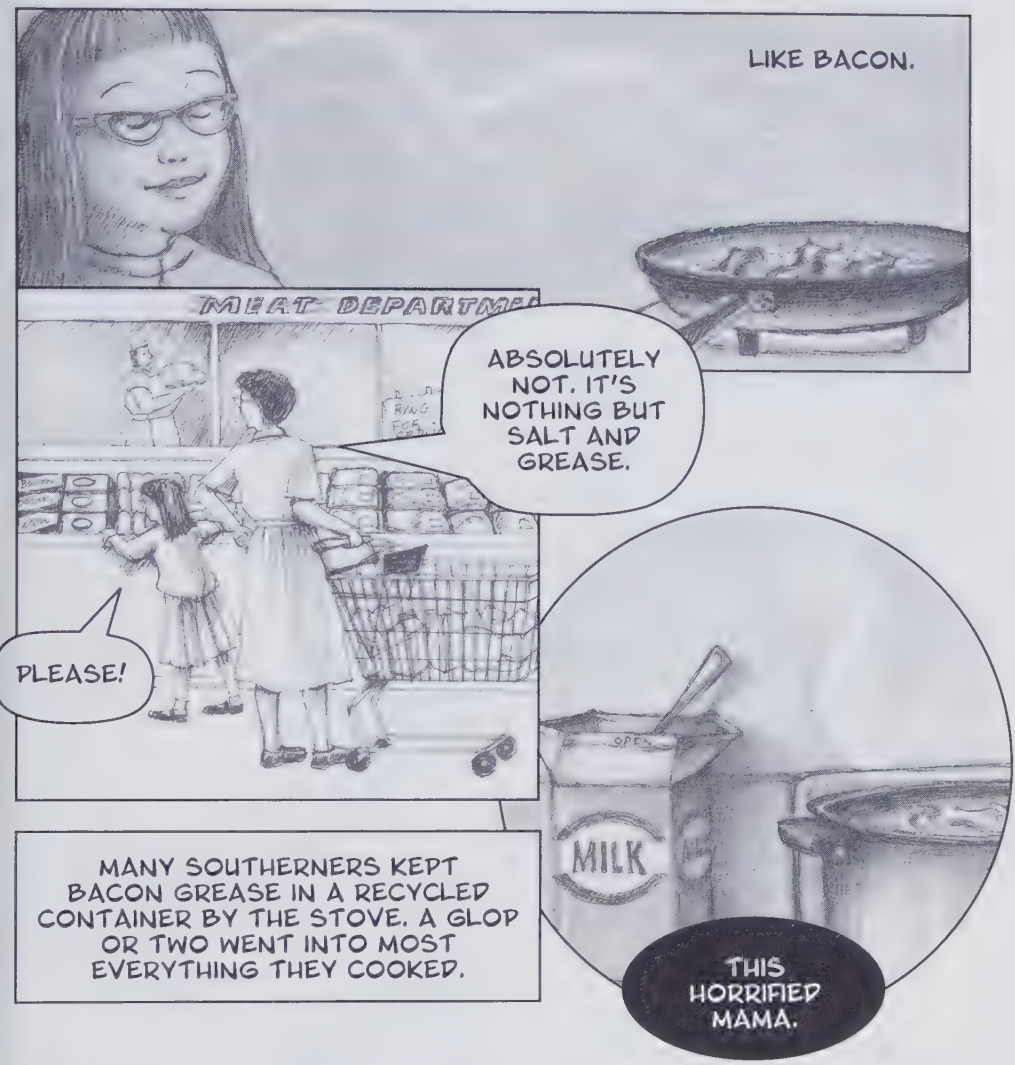
matambre **



ALL THIS AND MORE, SHE ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT AUTHENTIC INGREDIENTS AND OFTEN WITHOUT A RECIPE.

* A BREADED & FRIED STEAK ** A STUFFED ROLL OF BEEF

MY TASTE BUDS HAD BEEN TRAINED ON SOUTH AMERICAN FARE. BUT I HAD HANKERINGS THAT COULDN'T BE SATISFIED AT HOME.



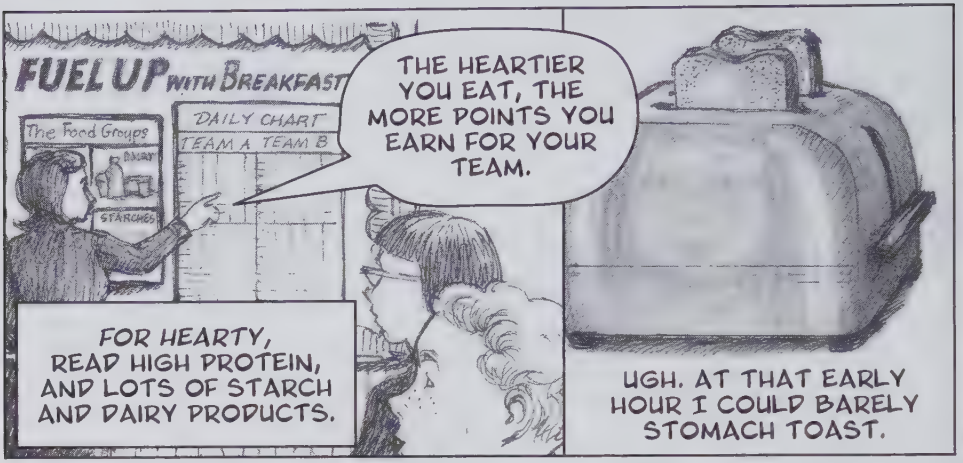
MANY SOUTHERNERS KEPT BACON GREASE IN A RECYCLED CONTAINER BY THE STOVE. A GLOP OR TWO WENT INTO MOST EVERYTHING THEY COOKED.

THERE WERE OTHER CULINARY PRACTICES THAT LEFT HER BEWILDERED.

GREEN BEAN CASSEROLE.

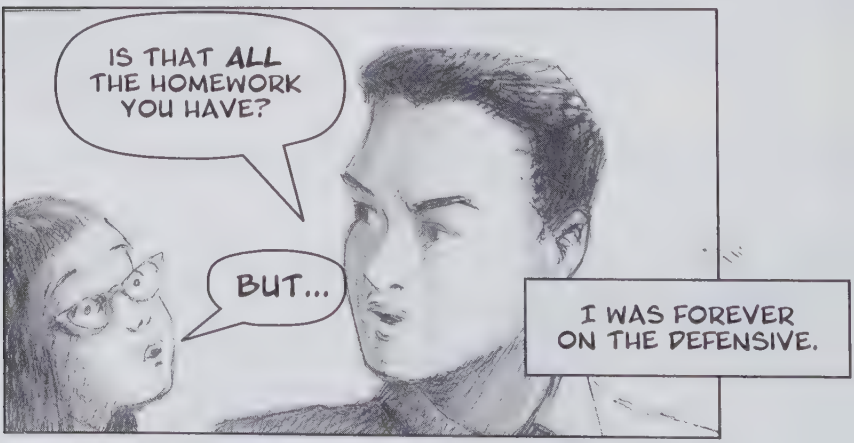
IT HARDLY SEEMED EDIBLE!

WHEN MY 3RD-GRADE TEACHER ANNOUNCED A BREAKFAST COMPETITION, THAT'S WHEN THE CULTURAL FOOD WARS BEGAN TO ENCROACH ON MY PEACE.



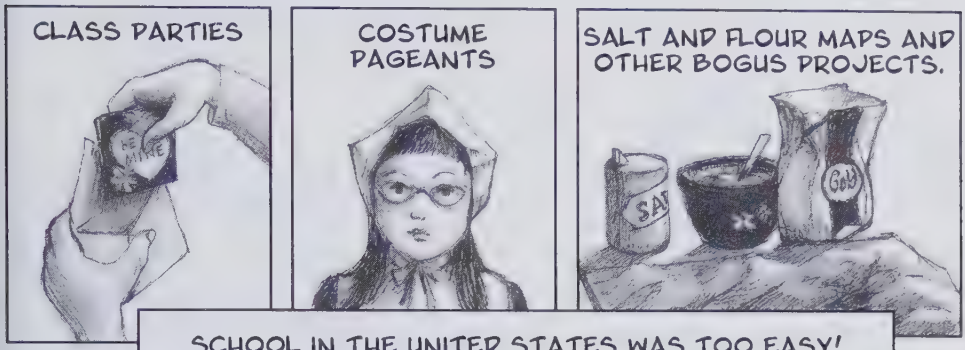
AND HOW WAS I, A KID, SUPPOSED TO GET MY HANDS ON HIGH-SCORING BREAKFAST FOODS?

I HAD YET ANOTHER PROBLEM THAT KEPT ME FROM APPEALING FOR HELP AT HOME: DADDY'S SCORN OF AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL METHODS.

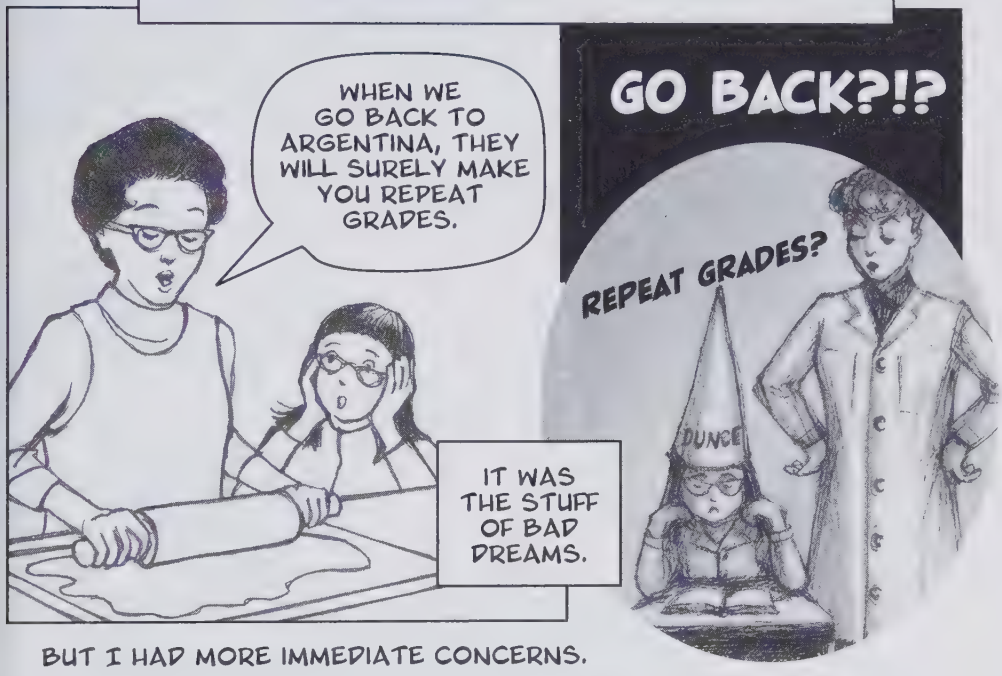


ACCORDING TO HIM, MY TEACHERS LET US PLAY TOO MUCH. THEY SOFTBALLED TOUGH SUBJECTS. THEY RELIED ON GIMMICKS RATHER THAN BOOKS.

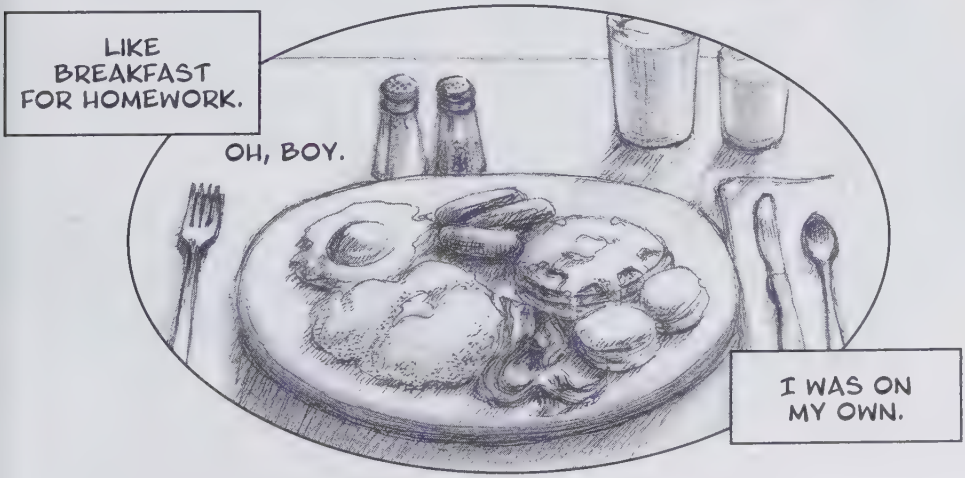
AND AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, THERE WERE FAR TOO MANY:



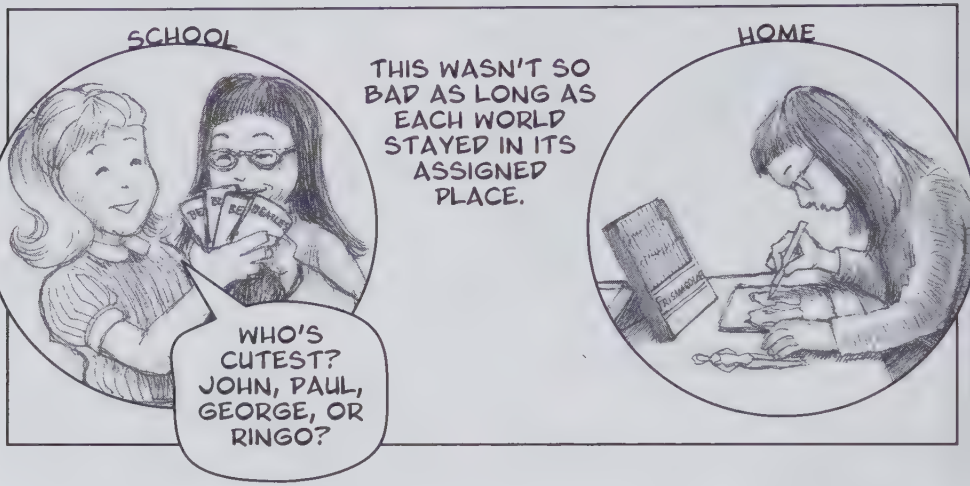
SCHOOL IN THE UNITED STATES WAS TOO EASY!



BUT I HAD MORE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS.



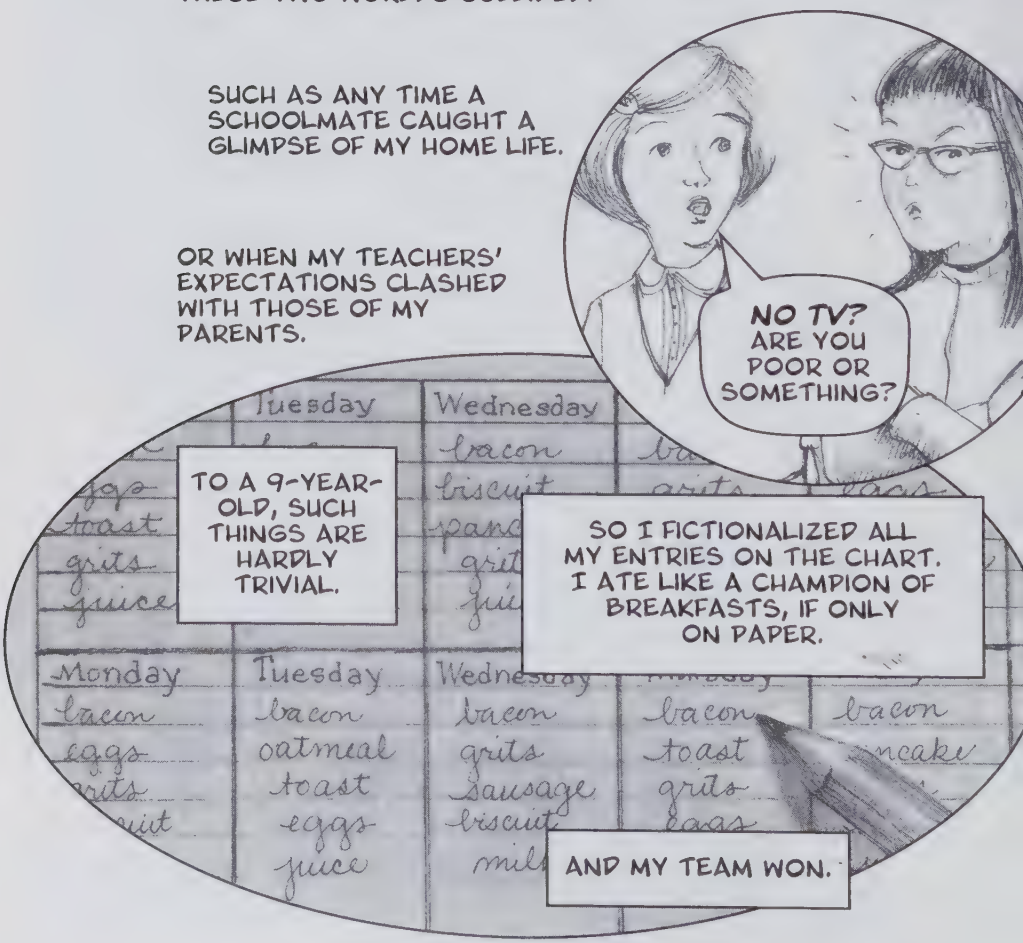
MORE AND MORE, I FOUND MYSELF ON MY OWN, SHUTTLING BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN MY TWO WORLDS.



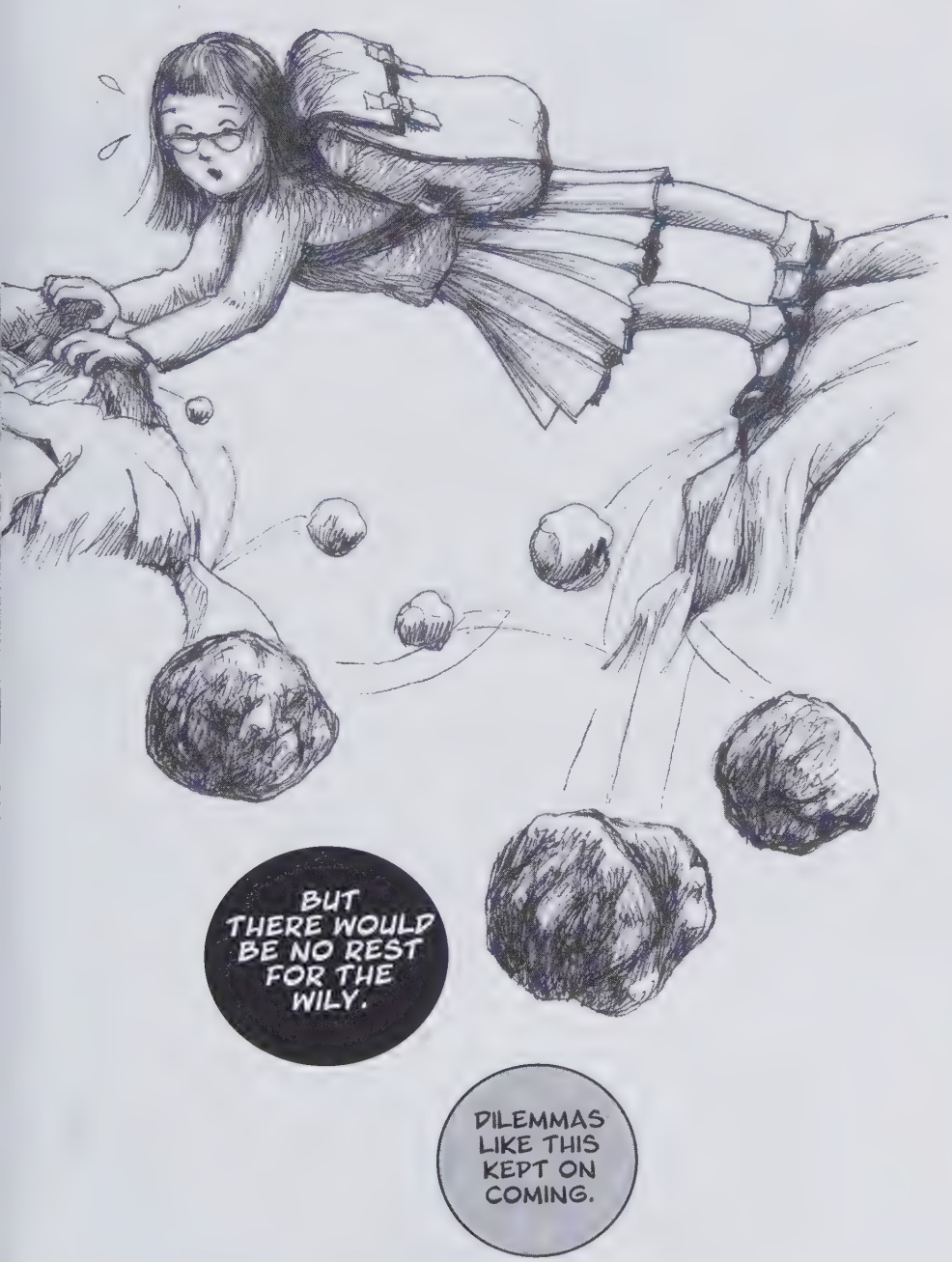
BUT SOMETIMES, DESPITE MY BEST EFFORTS, THESE TWO WORLDS COLLIDED.

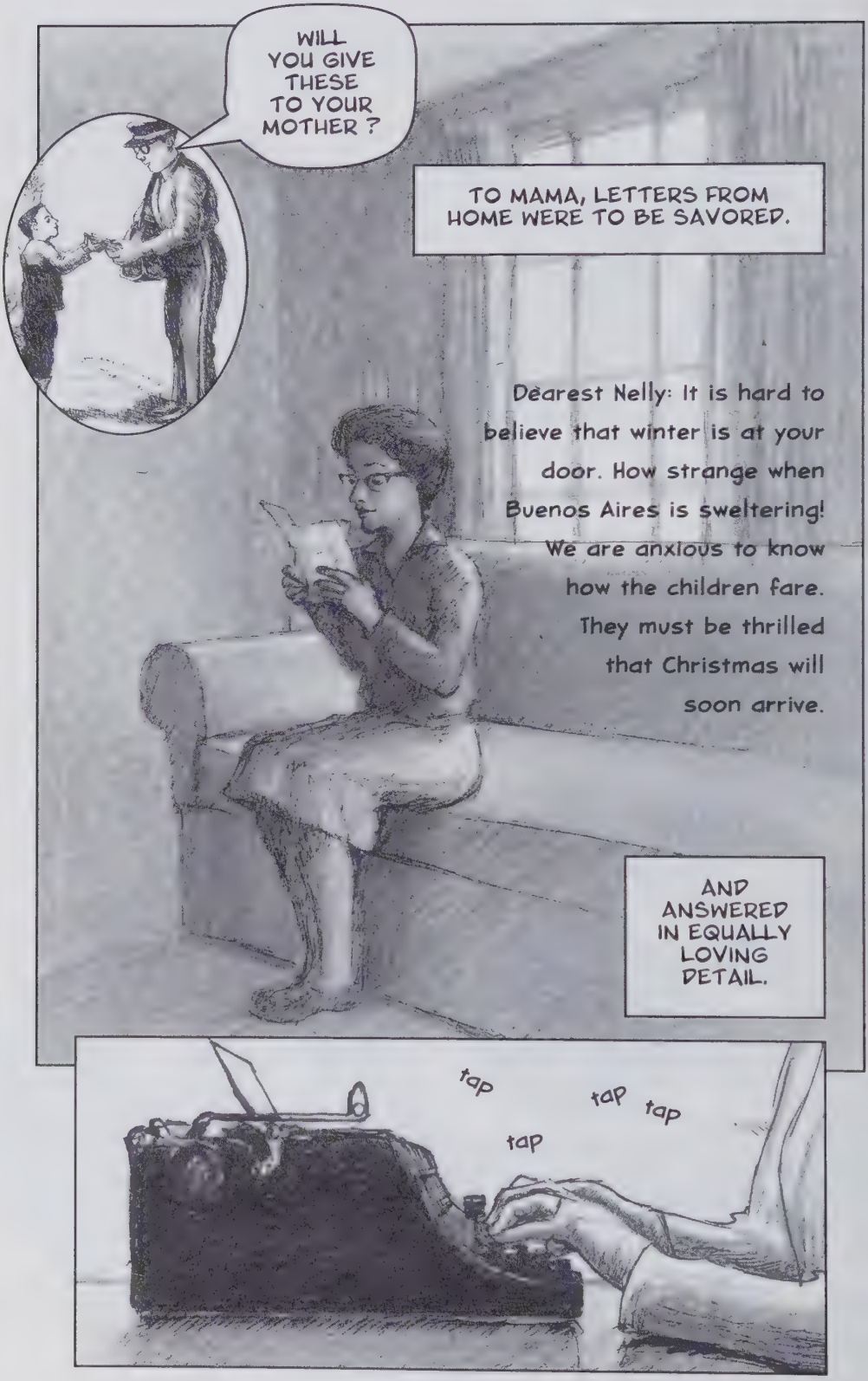
SUCH AS ANY TIME A SCHOOLMATE CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF MY HOME LIFE.

OR WHEN MY TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS CLASHED WITH THOSE OF MY PARENTS.

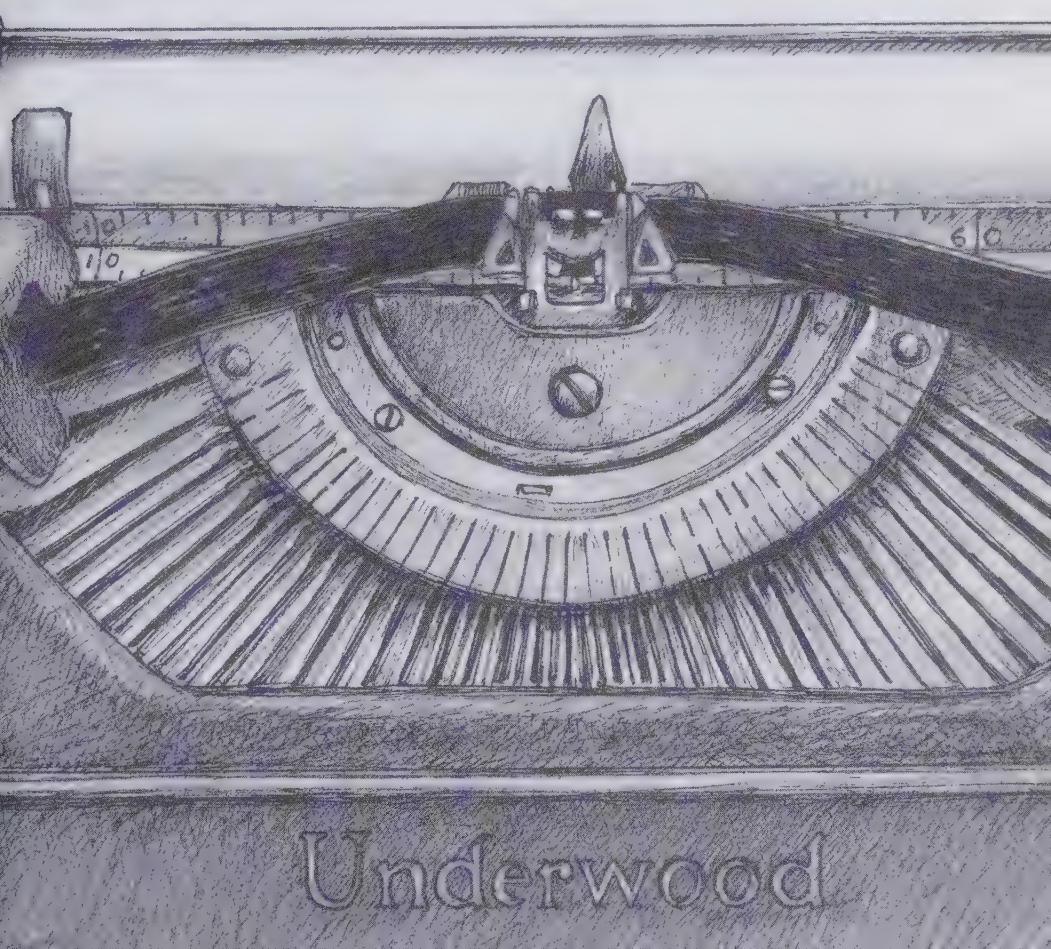


I SUMMONED WILINESS, AND IT CAME TO MY RESCUE. IT KEPT MY PARENTS IGNORANT OF THE BREAKAST LESSON AND MY TEACHER IGNORANT OF THEIR DISREGARD.

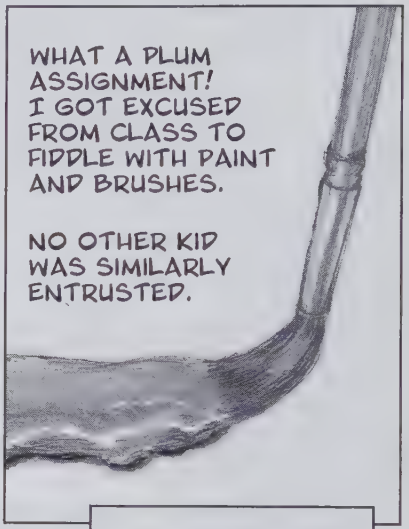



WILL YOU GIVE THESE TO YOUR MOTHER?
TO MAMA, LETTERS FROM HOME WERE TO BE SAVORED.
Dearest Nelly: It is hard to believe that winter is at your door. How strange when Buenos Aires is sweltering! We are anxious to know how the children fare. They must be thrilled that Christmas will soon arrive.
AND ANSWERED IN EQUALLY LOVING DETAIL.
tap
tap
tap
tap

We are all busy in our own way. Nestor's day consists of teaching or preparing to teach. He is truly in his element in the classroom. Ginny and Bill are settling in as newlyweds. Lissy is doing very well in school. She started the 7th grade and is collecting butterflies for a science project. I'm glad she's conscientious. There's little time to supervise anyone's homework, as I have several portraits to complete by Christmas. Johnny is the exception, of course, since he's learning to read and needs practice. Unless the weather's bad, he and Lila walk to school. I don't know what to do about Lila. She is our little neurotic! Her recurring nightmare is that she arrives at school without her books, although it has never happened—that I know of; she's rather secretive.



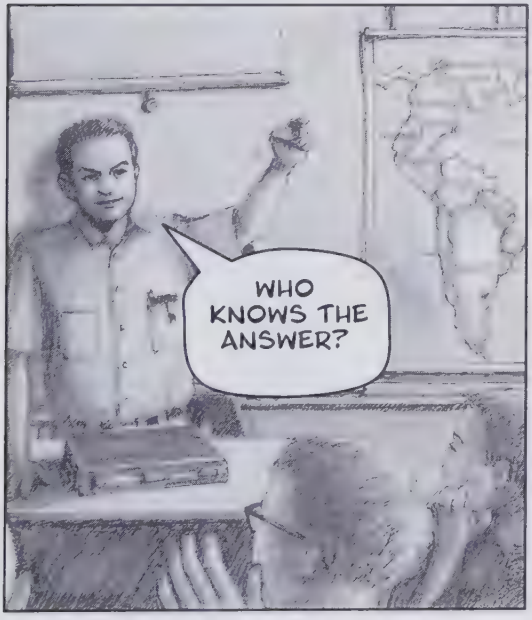
AT THAT MOMENT, I HAD FEW WORRIES. I WAS PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON MY SET DESIGN FOR THE NATIVITY PLAY.

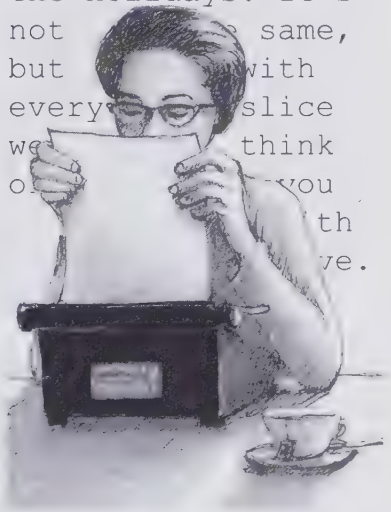


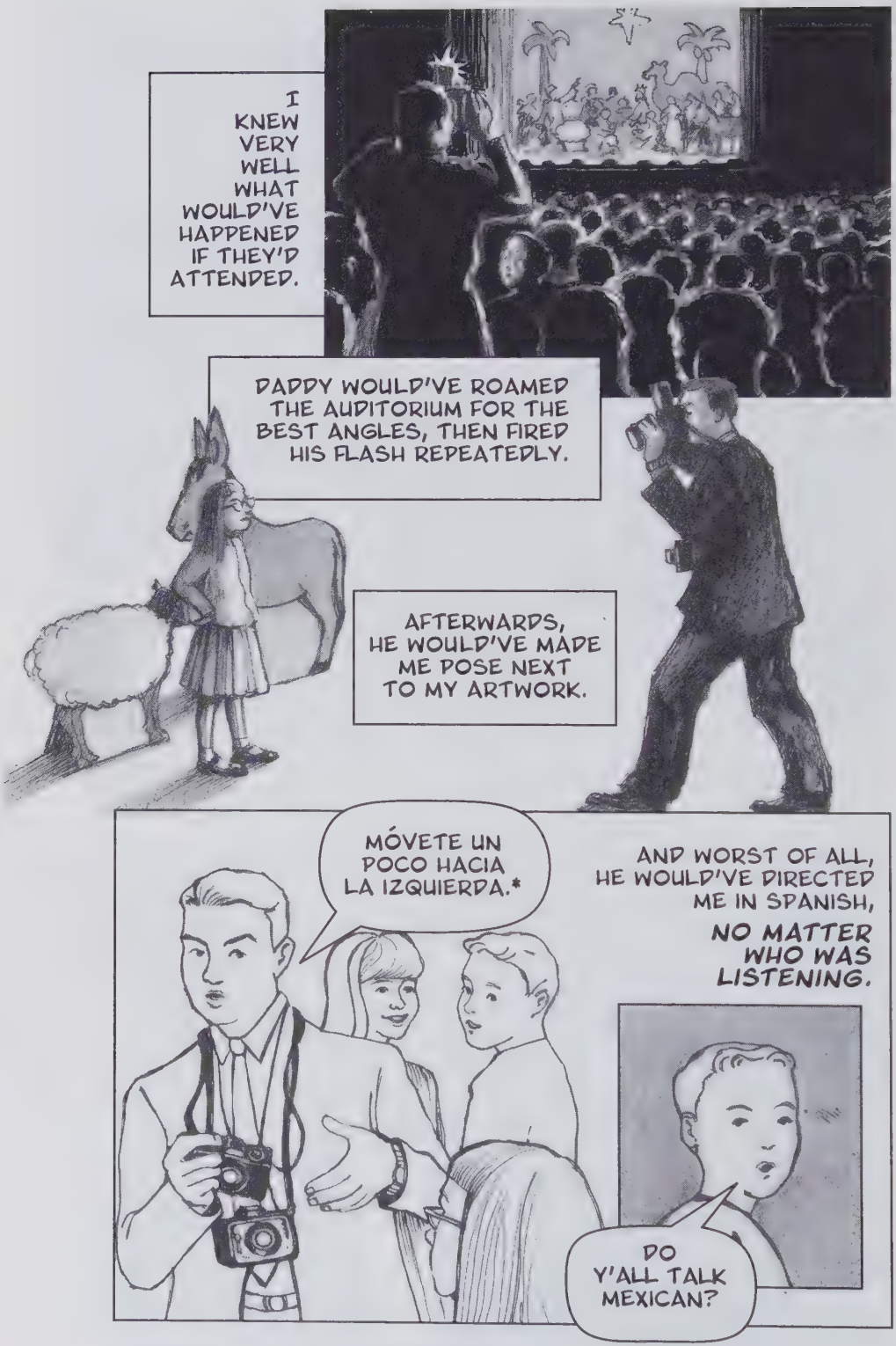
MY HANDIWORK TOOK THE STAGE ALONGSIDE CLASSMATES IN COSTUME.

We three kings of Orient are
bearing gifts, we traverse afar.

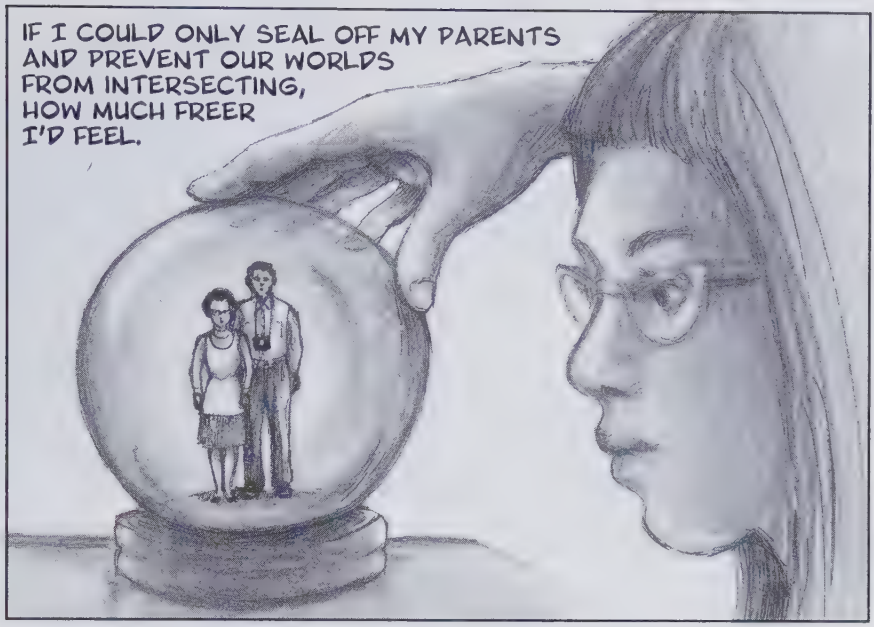
MY MOM AND DAD WERE GOING ABOUT THEIR NORMAL ACTIVITIES, OBLIVIOUS OF THE PLAY AND MY ROLE IN ITS STAGING.



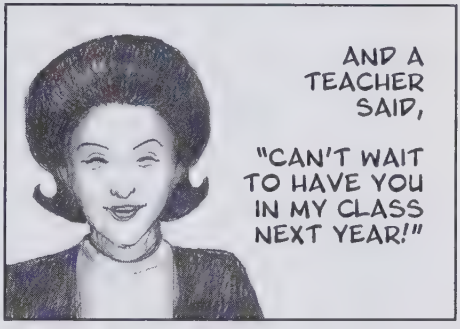


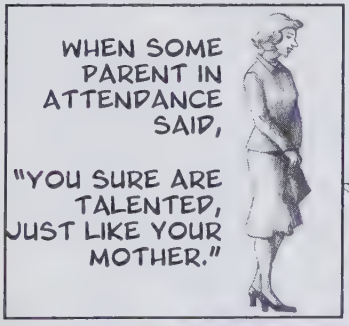


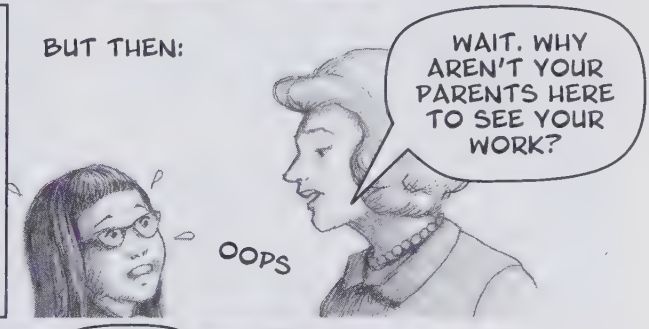
* MOVE A LITTLE TO THE LEFT.

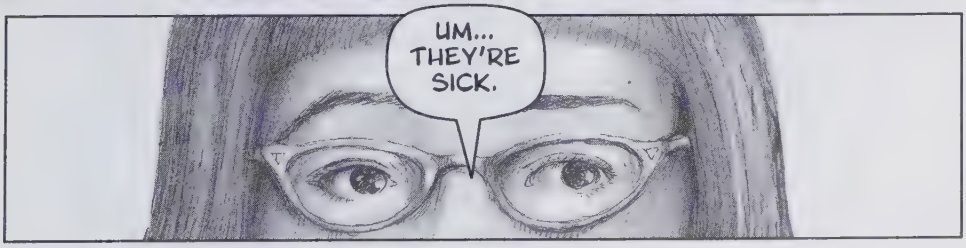


FREE TO REVEL IN THE MOMENT'S TRIUMPH...

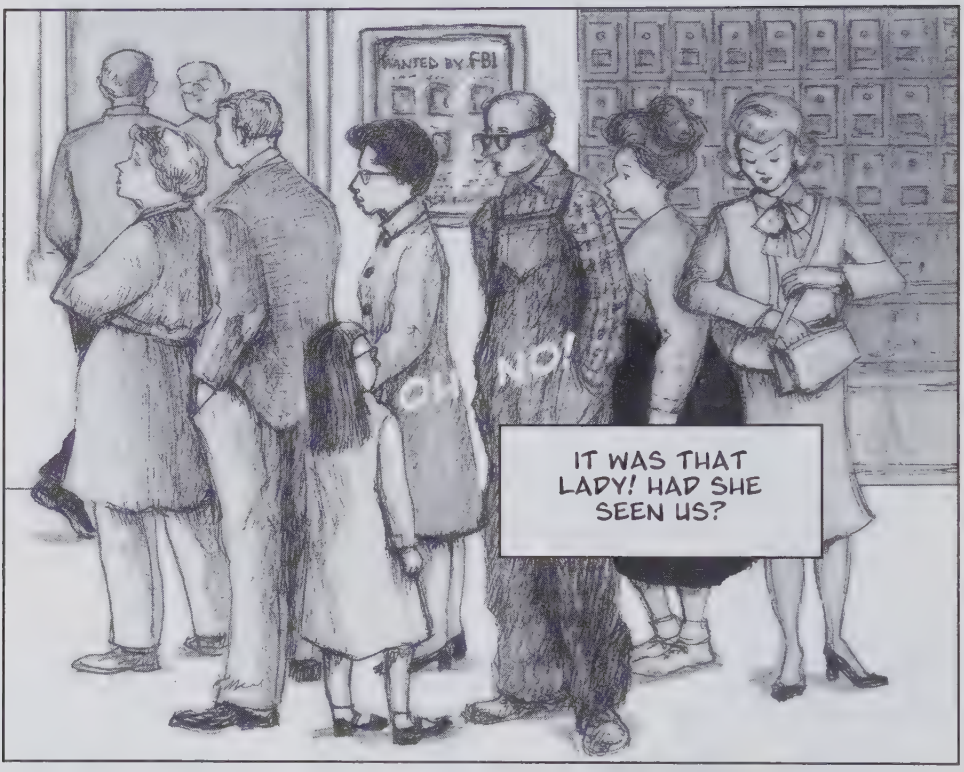


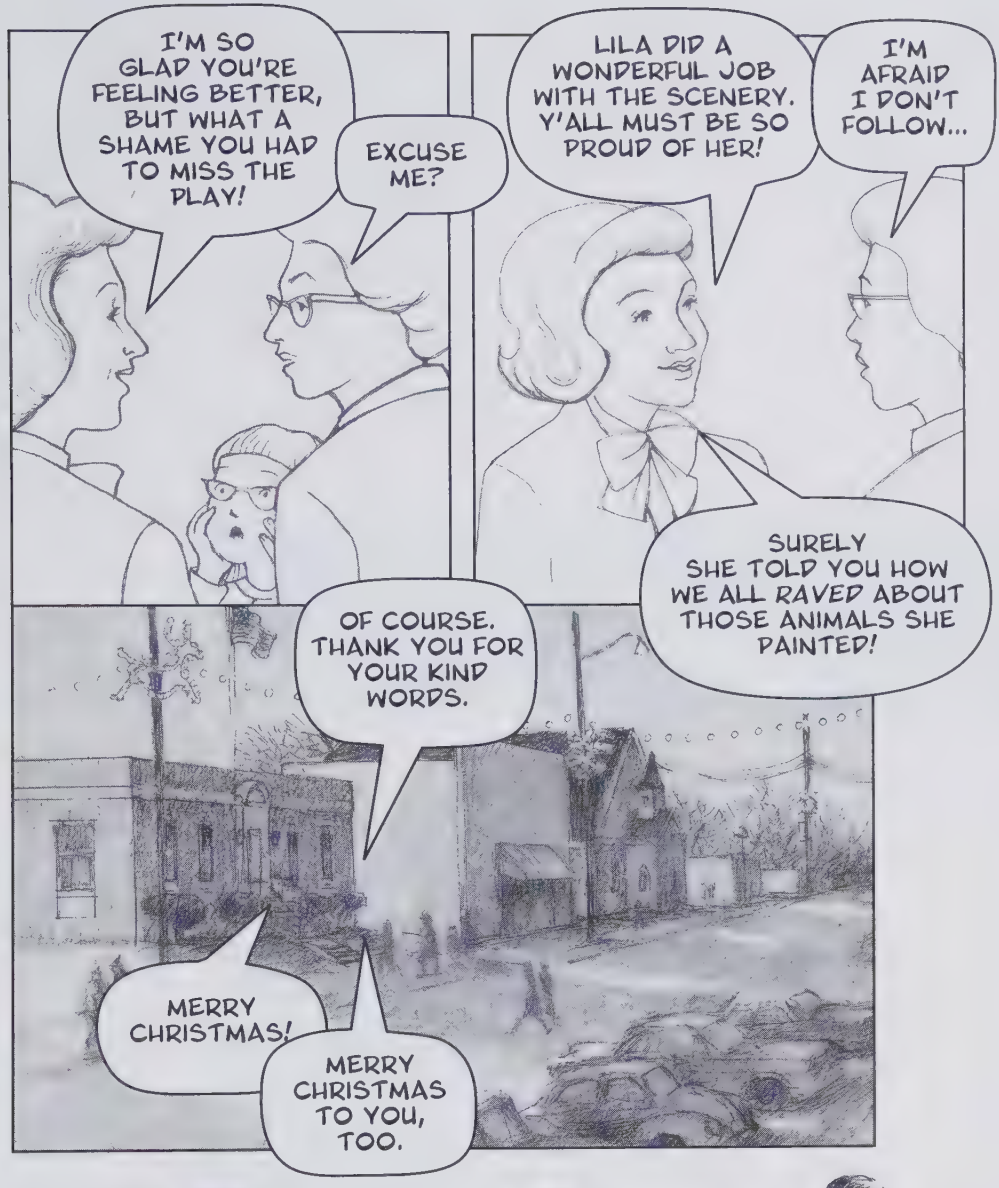






I THOUGHT I HAD THE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL, BUT A FEW DAYS LATER:

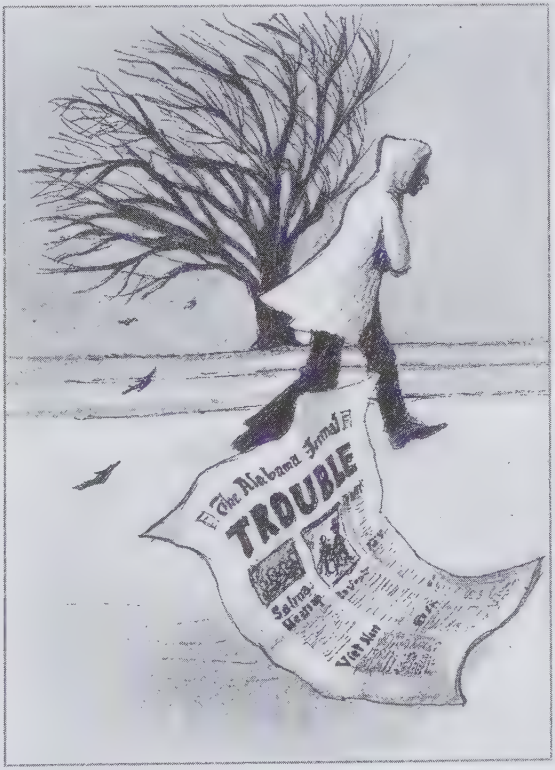


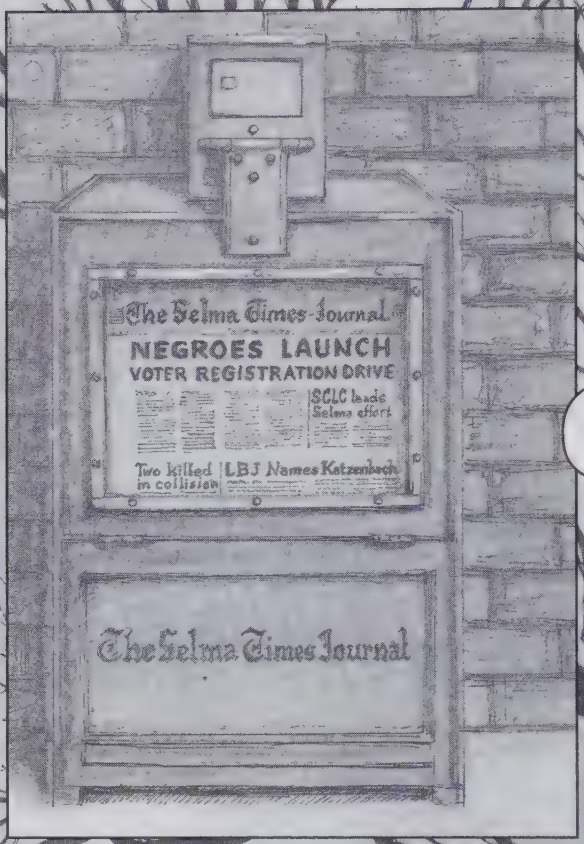

I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE FEELING BETTER, BUT WHAT A SHAME YOU HAD TO MISS THE PLAY!
EXCUSE ME?
LILA DID A WONDERFUL JOB WITH THE SCENERY. Y'ALL MUST BE SO PROUD OF HER!
I'M AFRAID I DON'T FOLLOW...
SURELY SHE TOLD YOU HOW WE ALL RAVED ABOUT THOSE ANIMALS SHE PAINTED!
OF COURSE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND WORDS.
MERRY CHRISTMAS!
MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU, TOO.

OH, LILA...
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US?

chapter 8

GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

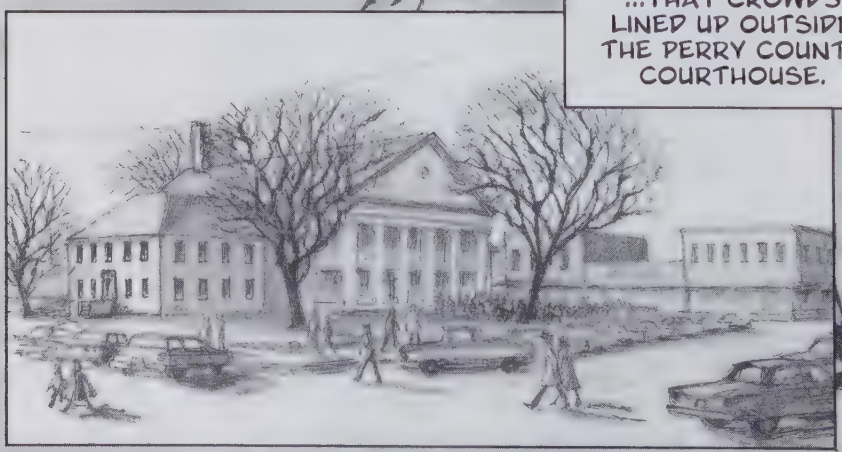




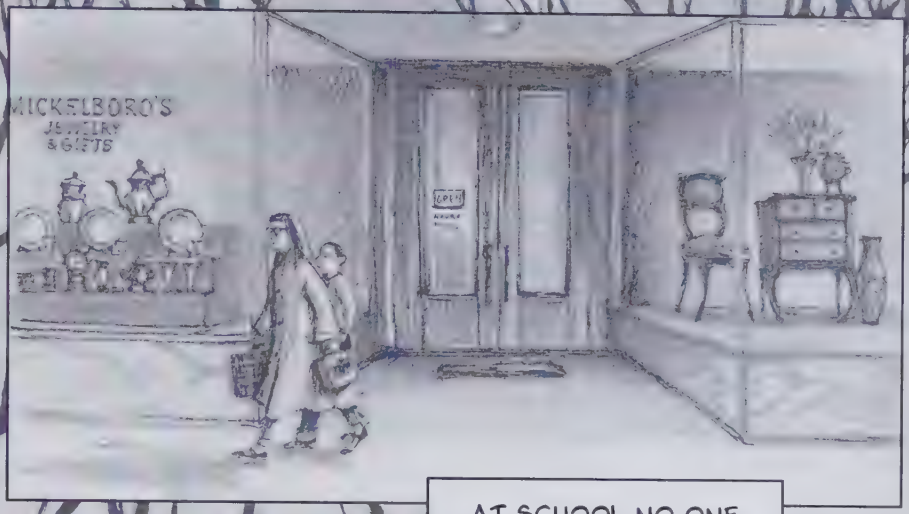
FEBRUARY 1965. IT HAD BEGUN.

ON OUR WALKS TO SCHOOL, IT'S QUITE POSSIBLE THAT MY BROTHER AND I PASSED RIGHT BY WITHOUT NOTICING...

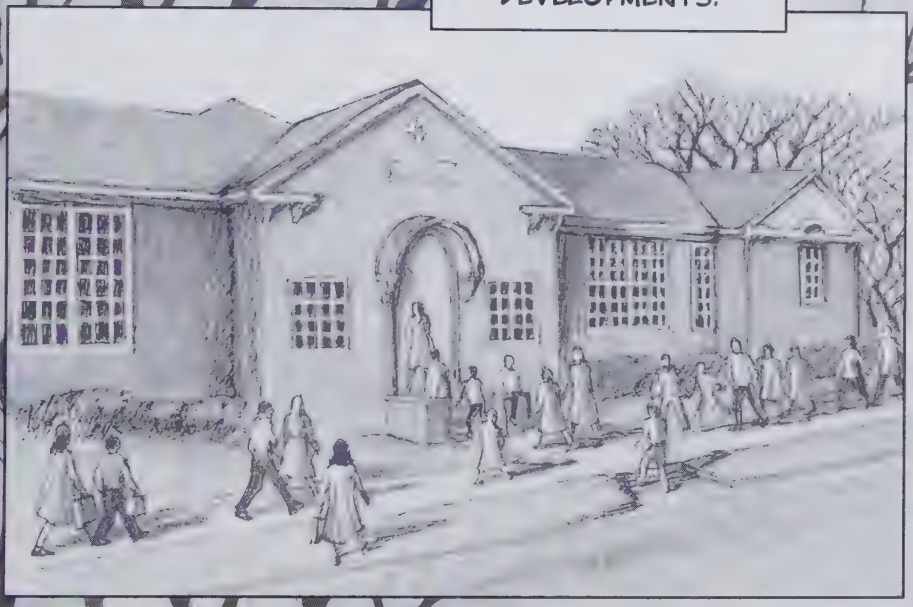
...THAT CROWDS LINED UP OUTSIDE THE PERRY COUNTY COURTHOUSE.



A SYSTEMATIC SUPPRESSION OF BLACK-VOTER REGISTRATION WAS UNDERWAY IN OUR COUNTY, AND BLACK CITIZENS WERE FIGHTING BACK.

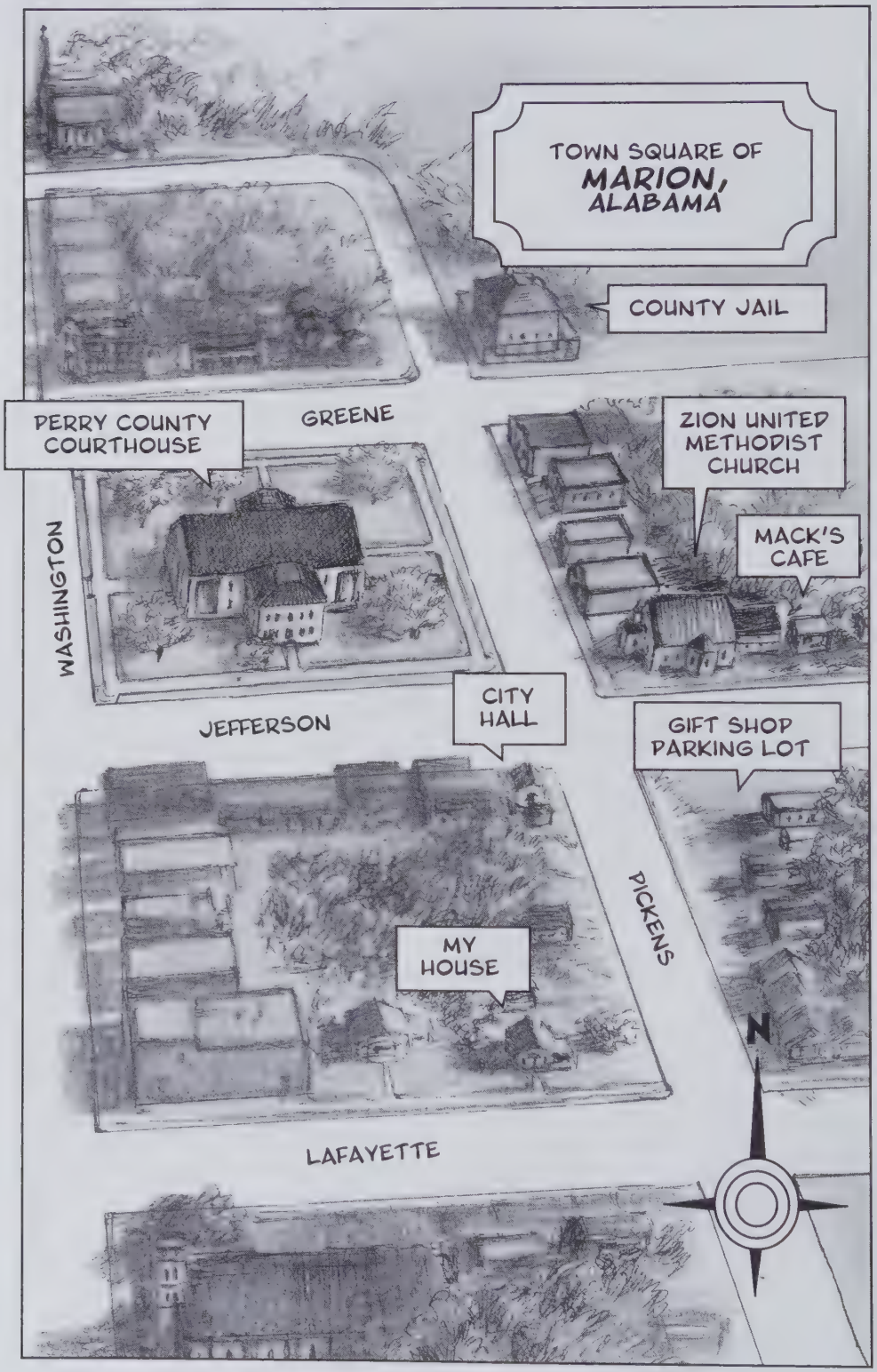


AT SCHOOL NO ONE POINTED OUT THESE DEVELOPMENTS.



TROUBLE WAS IN THE AIR, AND IN A TOWN THE SIZE OF MARION, MOST PEOPLE COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE.

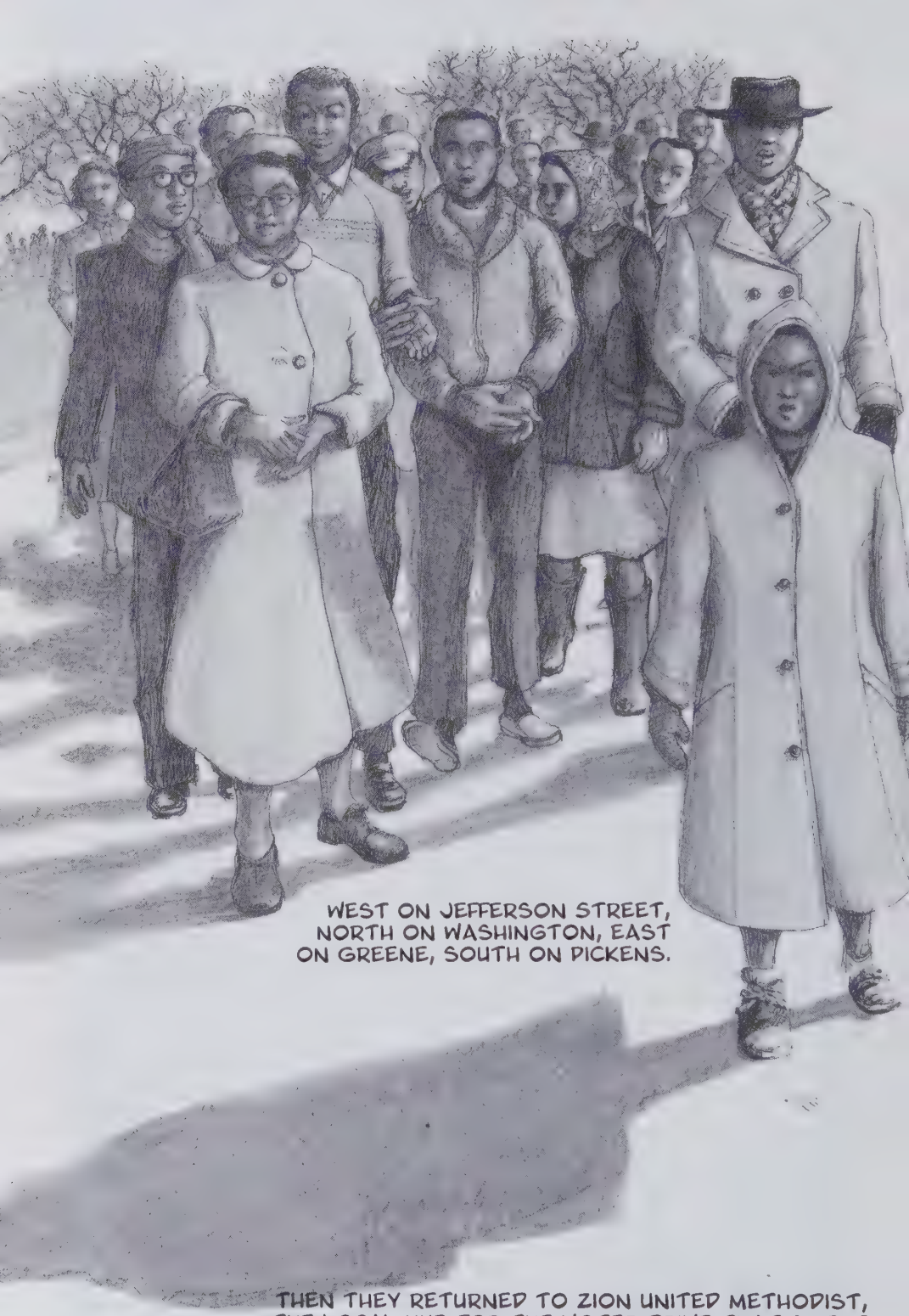
WE LIVED JUST ONE BLOCK FROM WHERE EVERYTHING HAPPENED.



INSIDE THE COURTHOUSE, A DAILY DRAMA UNFOLDED.

BUT THE BOARD OF REGISTRARS WASN'T IN SESSION. NOT TODAY, NOT TOMORROW, NOT ANY TIME THAT BLACK CITIZENS LINED UP TO APPLY.

AND SO THE PROTEST MARCHES BEGAN— AROUND THE COURTHOUSE SQUARE.

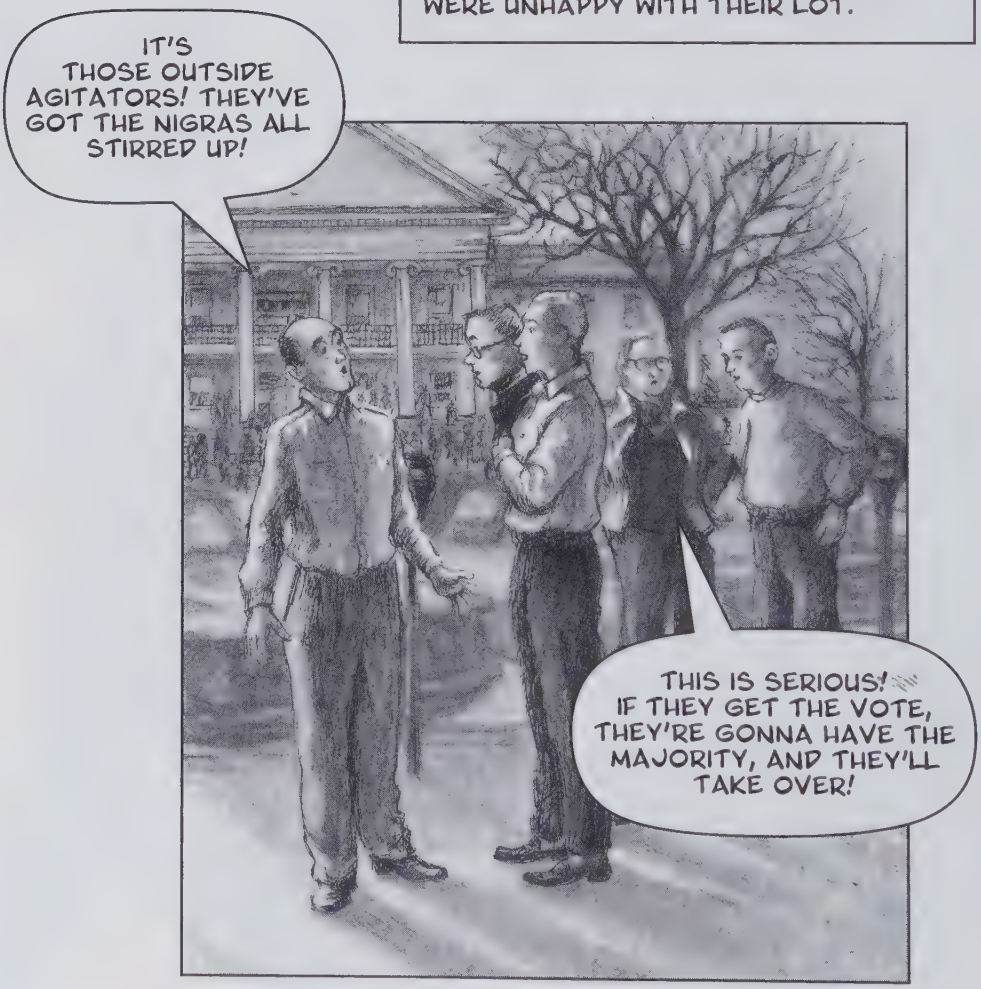

WEST ON JEFFERSON STREET, NORTH ON WASHINGTON, EAST ON GREENE, SOUTH ON PICKENS.
THEN THEY RETURNED TO ZION UNITED METHODIST, THE LOCAL HUB FOR THE VOTER DRIVE THAT SWEPT MUCH OF CENTRAL ALABAMA DURING THAT SEASON.

USING A HOME-MOVIE CAMERA, MY FATHER SHOT FOOTAGE OF THESE EVENTS.

WEEKS PASSED. THE REGISTRARS ALLOWED NO MORE THAN A TRICKLE OF BLACK APPLICANTS TO PROCEED. THE MARCHING WENT ON, WITH PARTICIPATION SWELLING TO 400 PEOPLE AT TIMES.

IN THE WHITE COMMUNITY, CONCERN GREW.

AMONG THE SPECTRUM OF REACTIONS, THERE WERE THOSE THAT REFUSED TO BELIEVE LOCAL AFRICAN AMERICANS WERE UNHAPPY WITH THEIR LOT.



LIKE THE SOUTH IN GENERAL, WHITE MARION HAD SOME RACIAL MODERATES AND GRADUALISTS, BUT ITS MOST OUTSPOKEN CITIZENS HELD A HARD LINE ON SEGREGATION.

AT THE COURTHOUSE: TEST 4

1. When thE Constitution was approved by the original colonies, how many states had to r[illegible] fect?

***--

ANY APPLICANT THAT GOT PAST THE STALLING TACTICS FACED THE LITERACY TEST.

2. Does enumeration affect the income tax levi[illegible]

***-

3. Th[illegible] ounted in th[illegible]:

***--[illegible]----

4. Of[illegible] th the large[illegible] ress [illegible] was -[illegible]

5. [illegible] ser-vices can only be for a period limited to

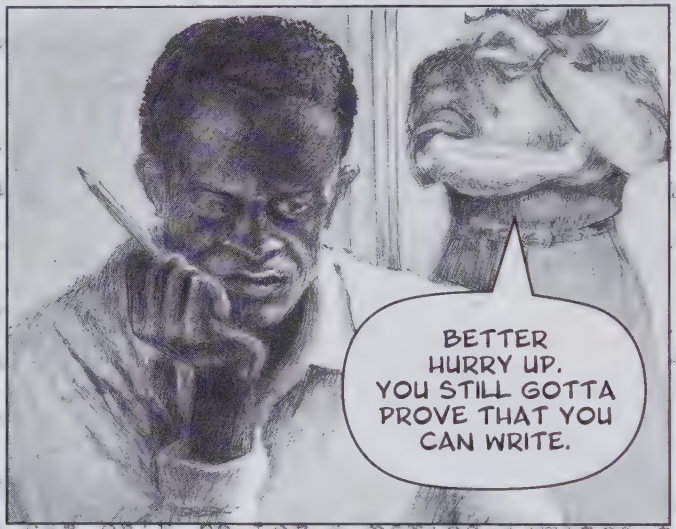
------ yyears.

BETTER HURRY UP. YOU STILL GOTTA PROVE THAT YOU CAN WRITE.

6. Casea tried before a court of law are two types, civil and----------.

7. Check the offenses whic[illegible] con-victed of them, disqualif[illegible]:

Murder----
Issuing worthless checks---
Petty larceny-----
Manufacturing whisky-----



WHITE VOTERS RECEIVED FAR EASIER VERSIONS OF THE TEST— OR NO TEST AT ALL.

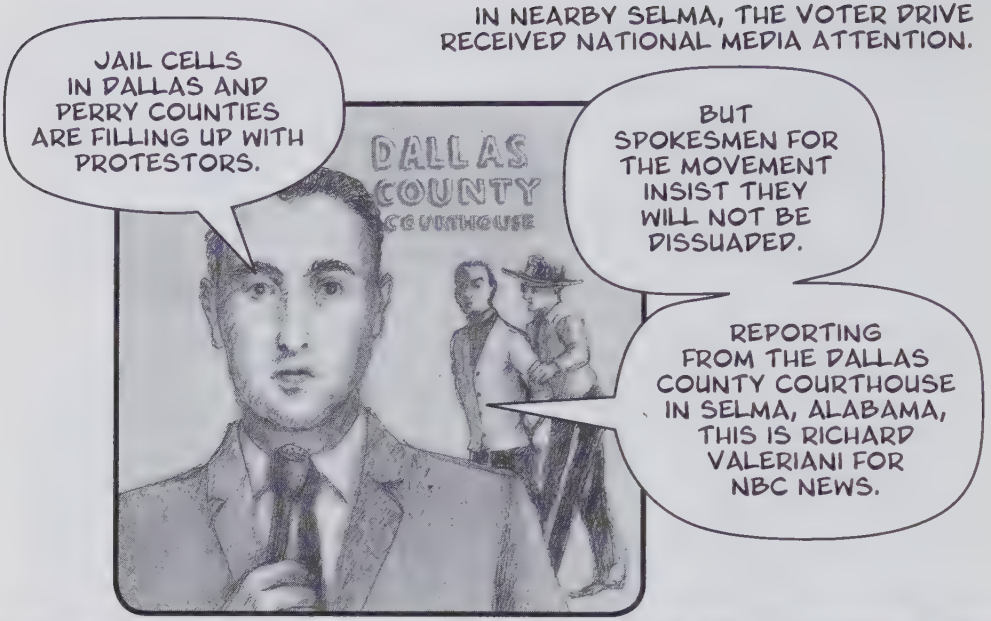
8. Impeachmentsof U.S. officials are tried by

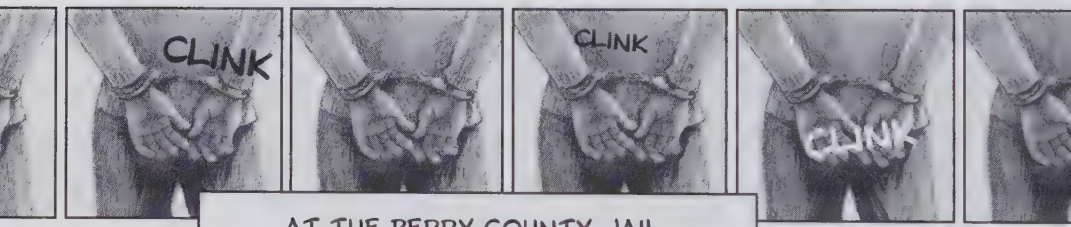
THE SENATE OF THE UNITED ST
SHA COMPO O S
EAC CHO
EGIS HER
S; A ENA
SHA E ONE
IMMEDIATELY AFT AL
ASSEMBLED IN CONSEQ
THE FIRST ELECTION, T
BE DIVIDED AS EQUALLY
INTO THREE CLASSES. THE SEA
OF THE SENATORS OF THE FIRS
CLASS SHALL BE VACATED AT
EXPIRATION OF THE SECOND YE
OF THE SECOND CLASS AT THE
PIRATION OF THE FOURTH
AND OF THE T CLA
EXPIRA
THAT
EVERY ND IF
VACAN RESIGN
TION, URING T
RECES TURE O
ANY S HE EXECUTIVE THE
OF MA TEMPORARY APP
MENTS HE NEXT MEETIN
OF THE LE URE, WHICH SH

NOW FOR THE SECOND PART. I'M GOING TO READ A PARAGRAPH FROM THE CONSTITUTION AND YOU WRITE IT ALL DOWN, WORD FOR WORD.

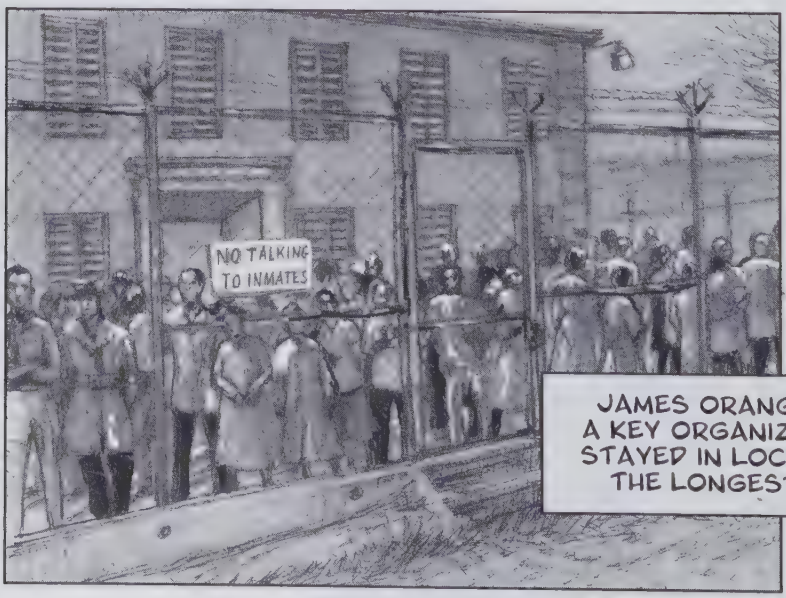
THE FAILURE RATE FOR THESE RIGGED TESTS WAS STAGGERING.

IN NEARBY SELMA, THE VOTER DRIVE RECEIVED NATIONAL MEDIA ATTENTION.

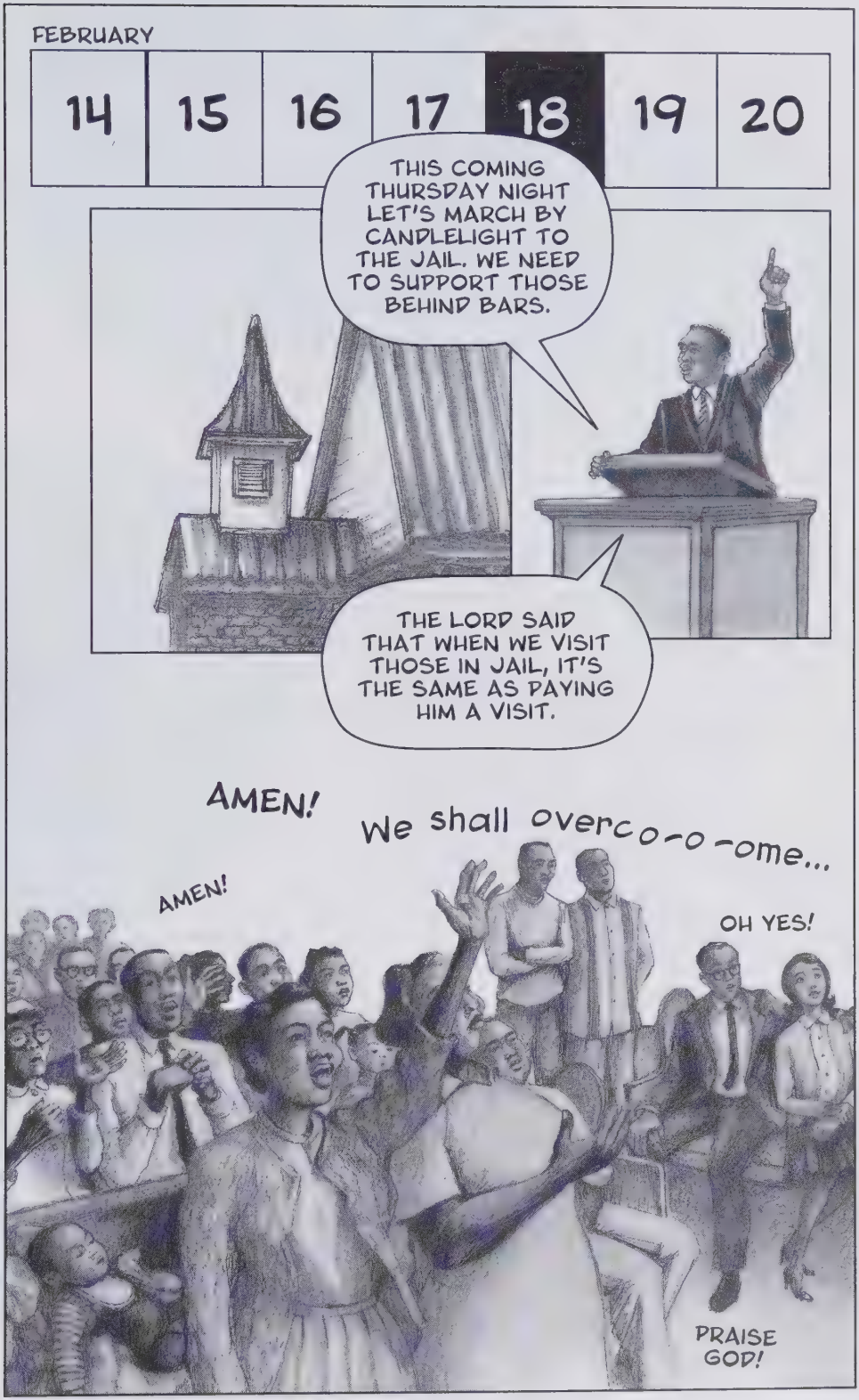


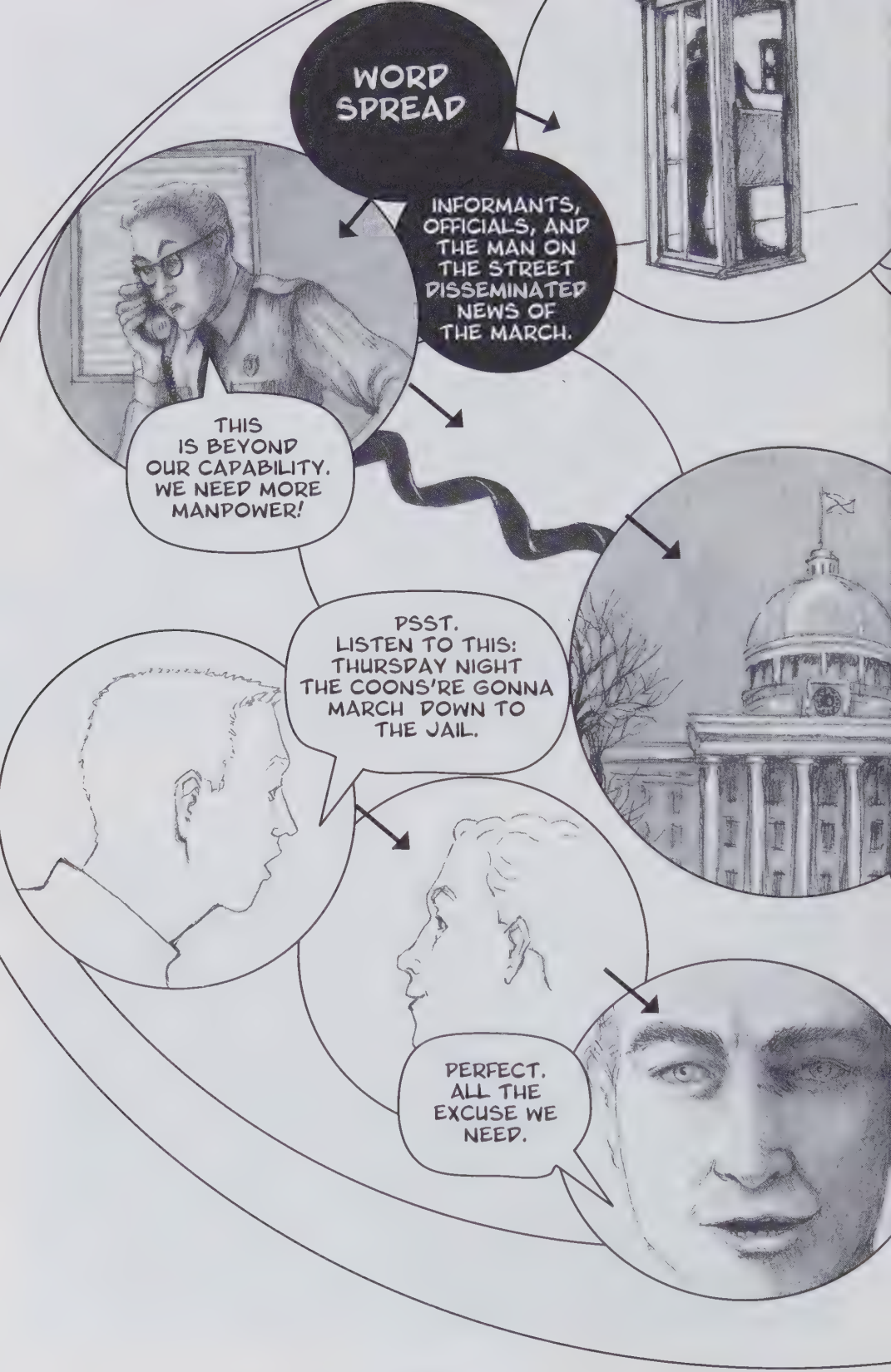


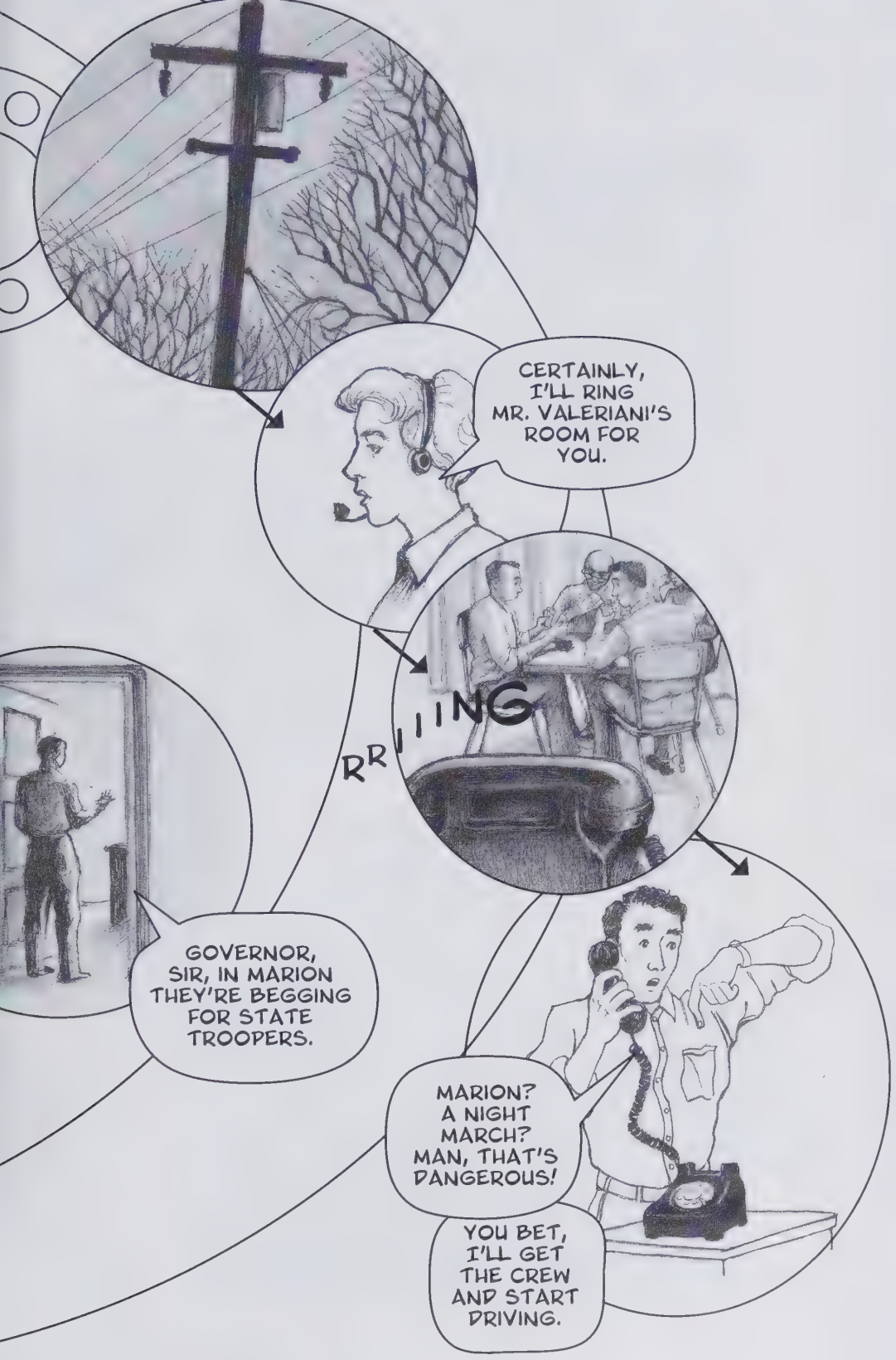
AT THE PERRY COUNTY JAIL, THEY SOON RAN OUT OF CELLS.



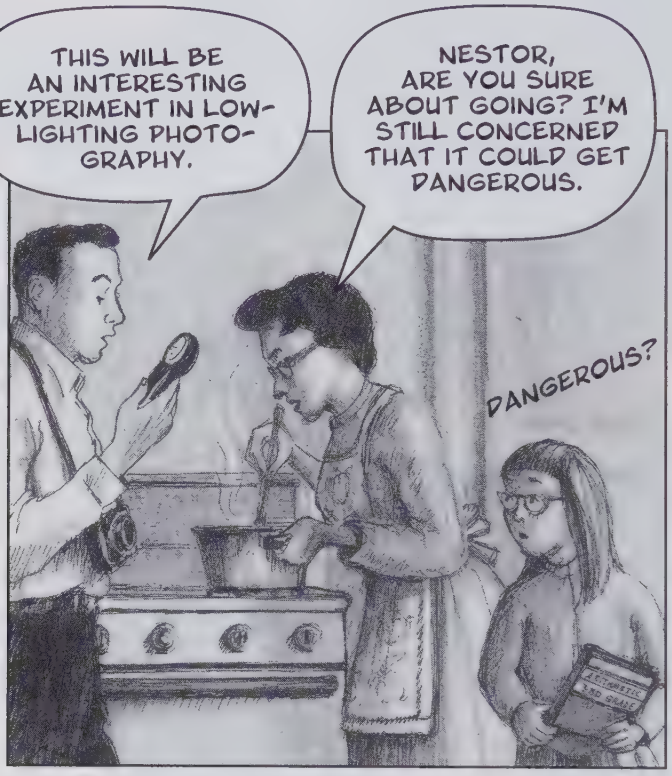
JAMES ORANGE, A KEY ORGANIZER, STAYED IN LOCKUP THE LONGEST.


FEBRUARY
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
THIS COMING THURSDAY NIGHT LET'S MARCH BY CANDLELIGHT TO THE JAIL. WE NEED TO SUPPORT THOSE BEHIND BARS.
THE LORD SAID THAT WHEN WE VISIT THOSE IN JAIL, IT'S THE SAME AS PAYING HIM A VISIT.
AMEN!
We shall overco-o-ome...
AMEN!
OH YES!
PRAISE GOD!


WORD SPREAD
INFORMANTS, OFFICIALS, AND THE MAN ON THE STREET DISSEMINATED NEWS OF THE MARCH.
THIS IS BEYOND OUR CAPABILITY. WE NEED MORE MANPOWER!
PSST. LISTEN TO THIS: THURSDAY NIGHT THE COONS'RE GONNA MARCH DOWN TO THE JAIL.
PERFECT. ALL THE EXCUSE WE NEED.

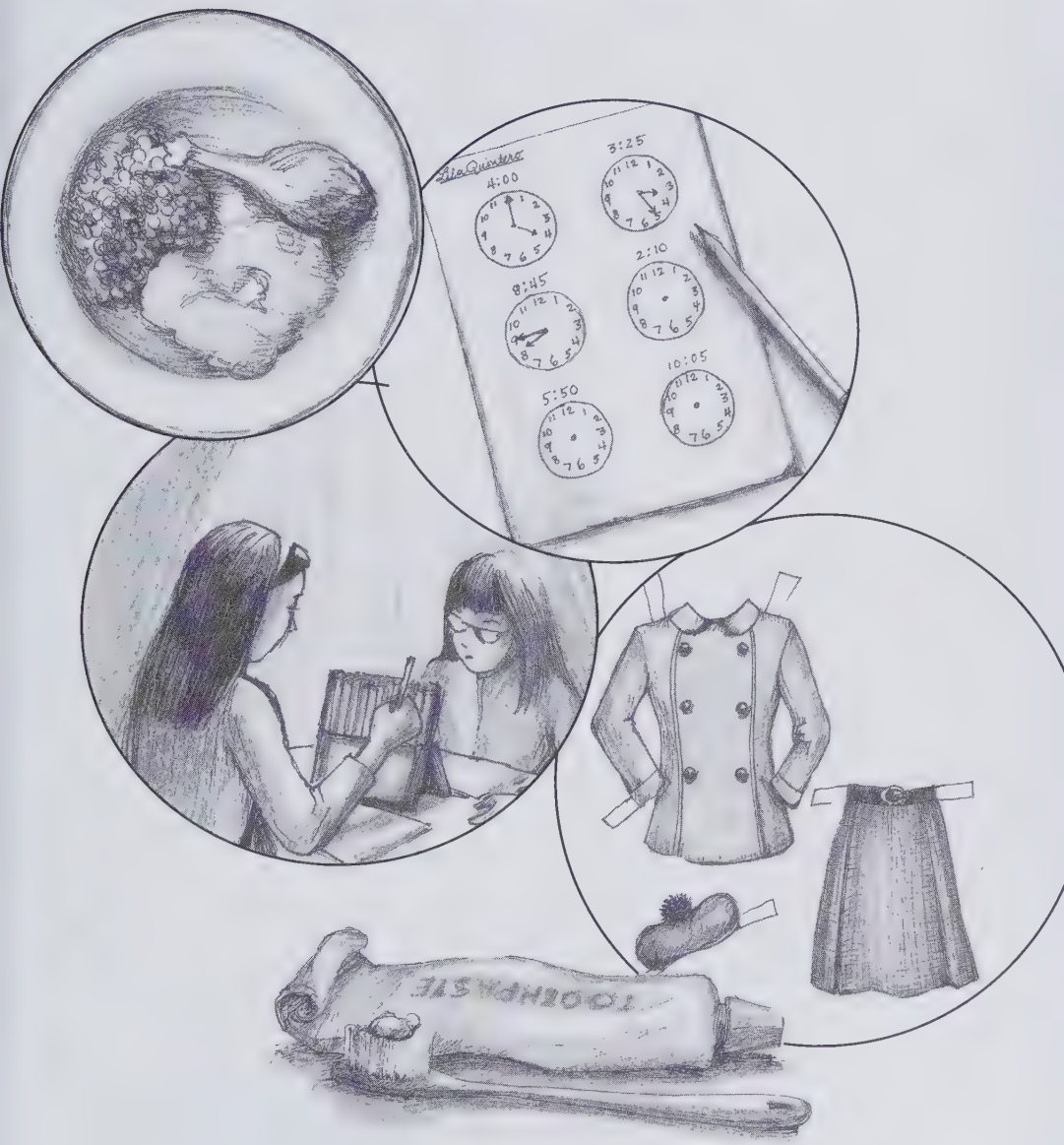

CERTAINLY, I'LL RING MR. VALERIANI'S ROOM FOR YOU.
RRIIING
GOVERNOR, SIR, IN MARION THEY'RE BEGGING FOR STATE TROOPERS.
MARION? A NIGHT MARCH? MAN, THAT'S DANGEROUS!
YOU BET, I'LL GET THE CREW AND START DRIVING.

DADDY HAD ALSO GOTTEN NEWS OF THAT NIGHT'S MARCH.



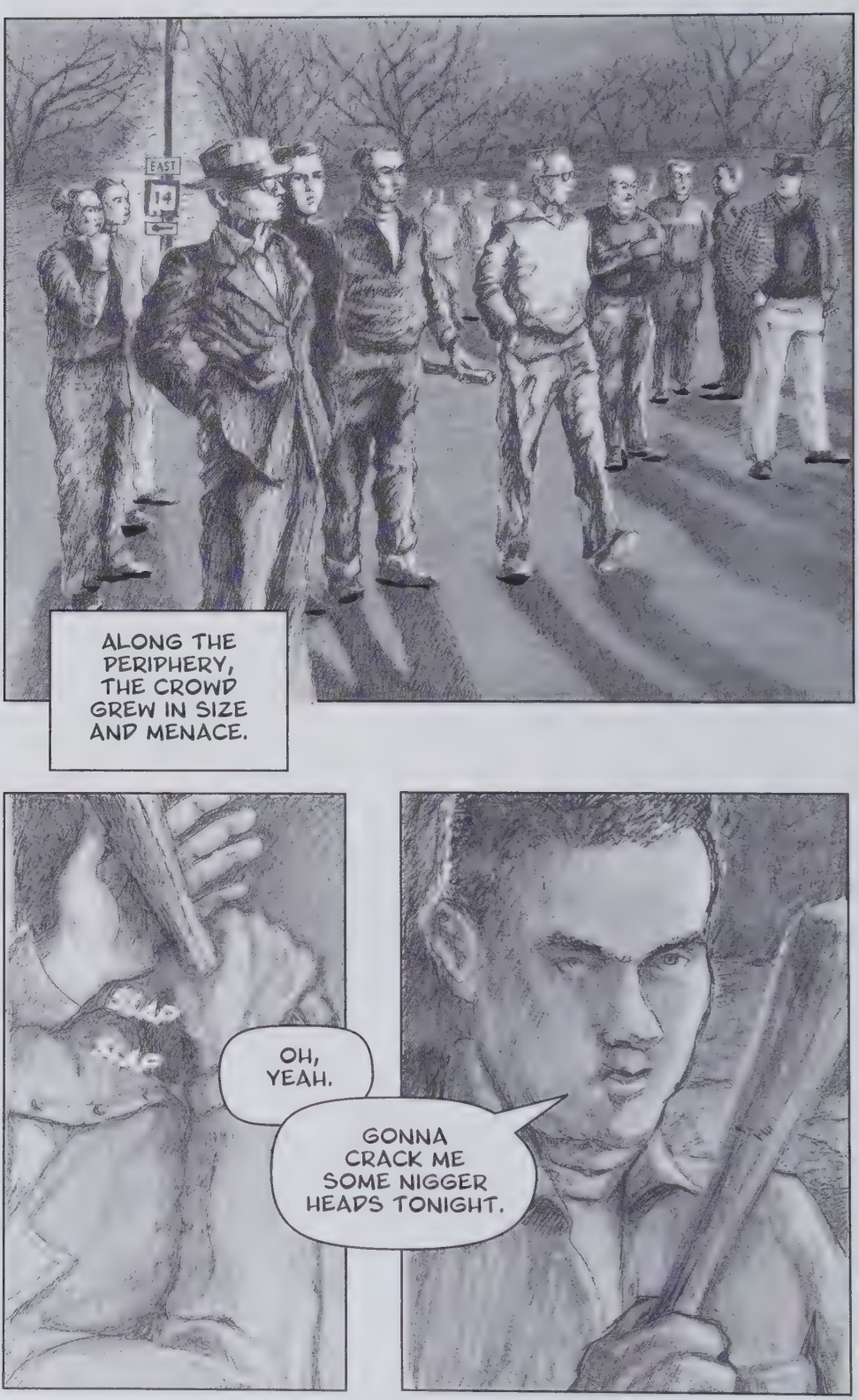
FEBRUARY 18

FOR EVERYONE BESIDES DADDY, IT WAS A REGULAR NIGHT AT HOME.



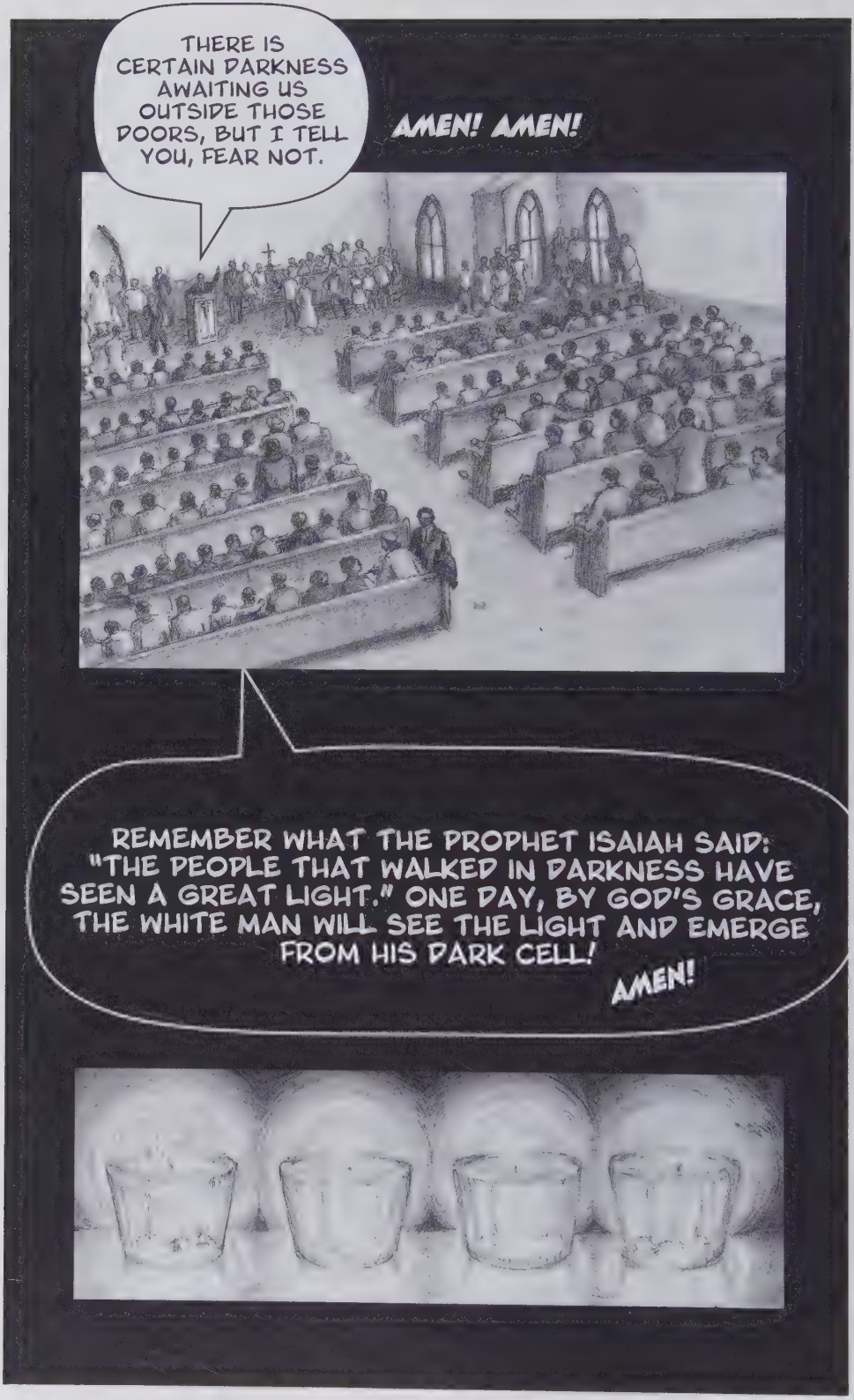
WHEN HE ARRIVED AT THE INTERSECTION OF PICKENS AND JEFFERSON, DADDY FOUND LAW-ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS FROM CITY, COUNTY, AND STATE AGENCIES.
AT THE GIFT SHOP'S CORNER PARKING LOT, HE STOOD ALONGSIDE JOURNALISTS AND CURIOUS BYSTANDERS.
AT LEAST ONE PARTICIPATING JOURNALIST HAD A HOUSEHOLD NAME.
OH, YEAH. THE FELLOW WITH THE TIE IS VALERIANI FROM NBC.

THE BYSTANDERS INCLUDED LOCAL WHITE MEN THAT DADDY RECOGNIZED AND MANY OTHERS THAT SEEMED TO HAVE COME FROM BEYOND PERRY COUNTY.


EAST
14
ALONG THE PERIPHERY, THE CROWD GREW IN SIZE AND MENACE.
OH, YEAH.
GONNA CRACK ME SOME NIGGER HEADS TONIGHT.

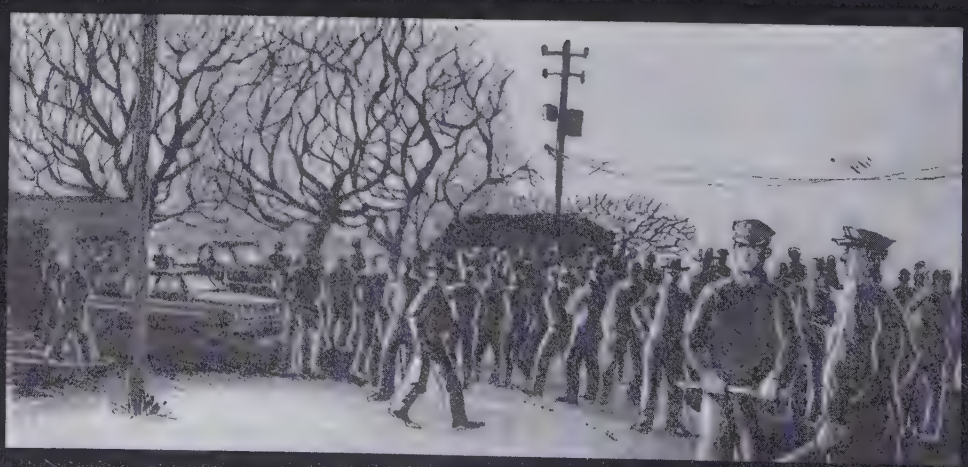
INSIDE THE CHURCH, PROTESTORS PREPARED TO FACE A HOSTILE CROWD. I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE WORDS THAT STEELED THEM.

WE HEAR YOU!

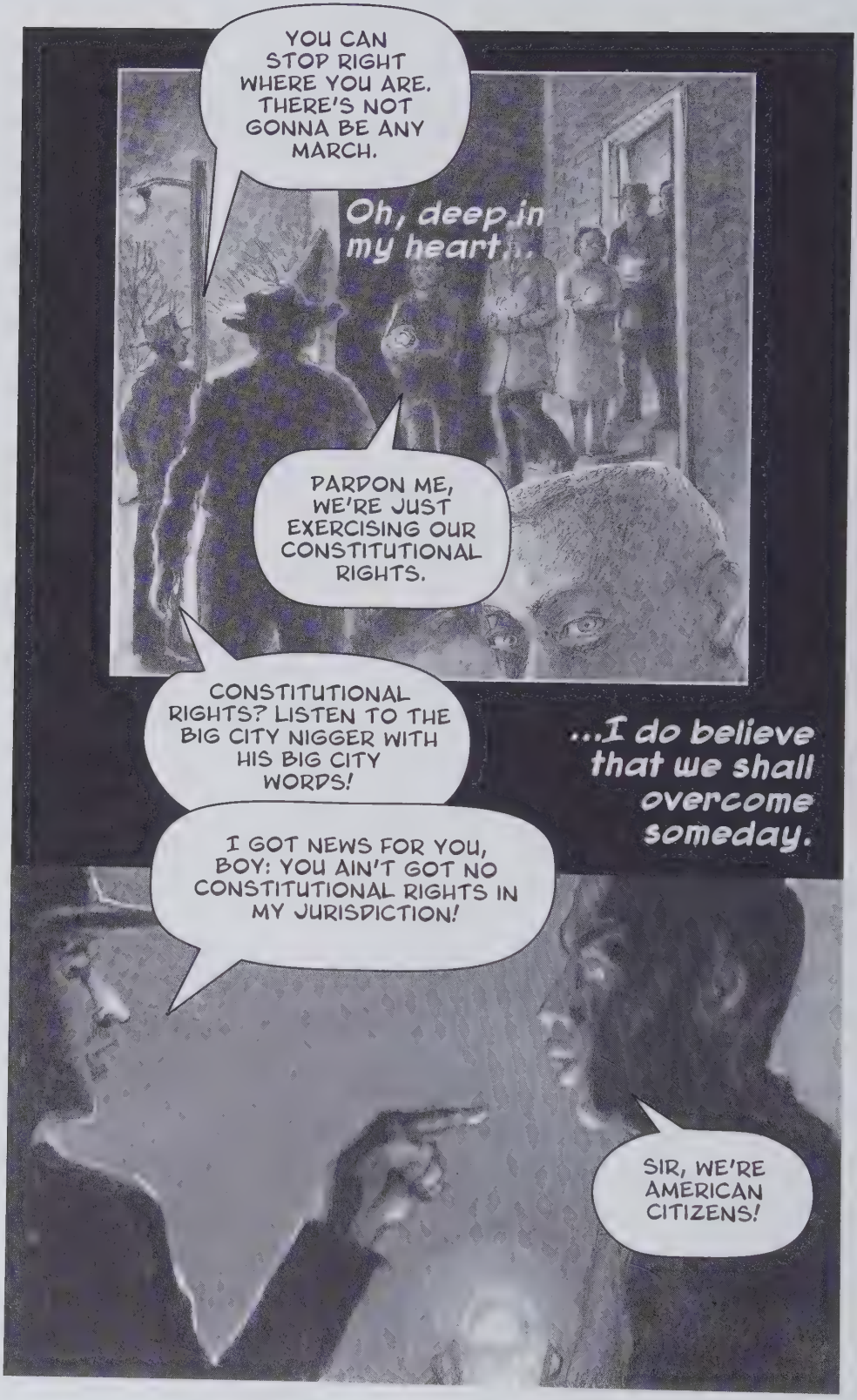

THERE IS CERTAIN DARKNESS AWAITING US OUTSIDE THOSE DOORS, BUT I TELL YOU, FEAR NOT.
AMEN! AMEN!
REMEMBER WHAT THE PROPHET ISAIAH SAID: "THE PEOPLE THAT WALKED IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT." ONE DAY, BY GOD'S GRACE, THE WHITE MAN WILL SEE THE LIGHT AND EMERGE FROM HIS DARK CELL!
AMEN!

THEY'VE GOT TO COME OUT SOONER OR LATER.
IF Y'ALL'RE GONNA TAKE CARE OF BUSINESS LIKE NEEDS DOING, I RECOMMEND YOU MAKE THE *HELL* SURE NOBODY GETS A PICTURE OF IT.
LISTEN. I HEAR THEM SINGING!

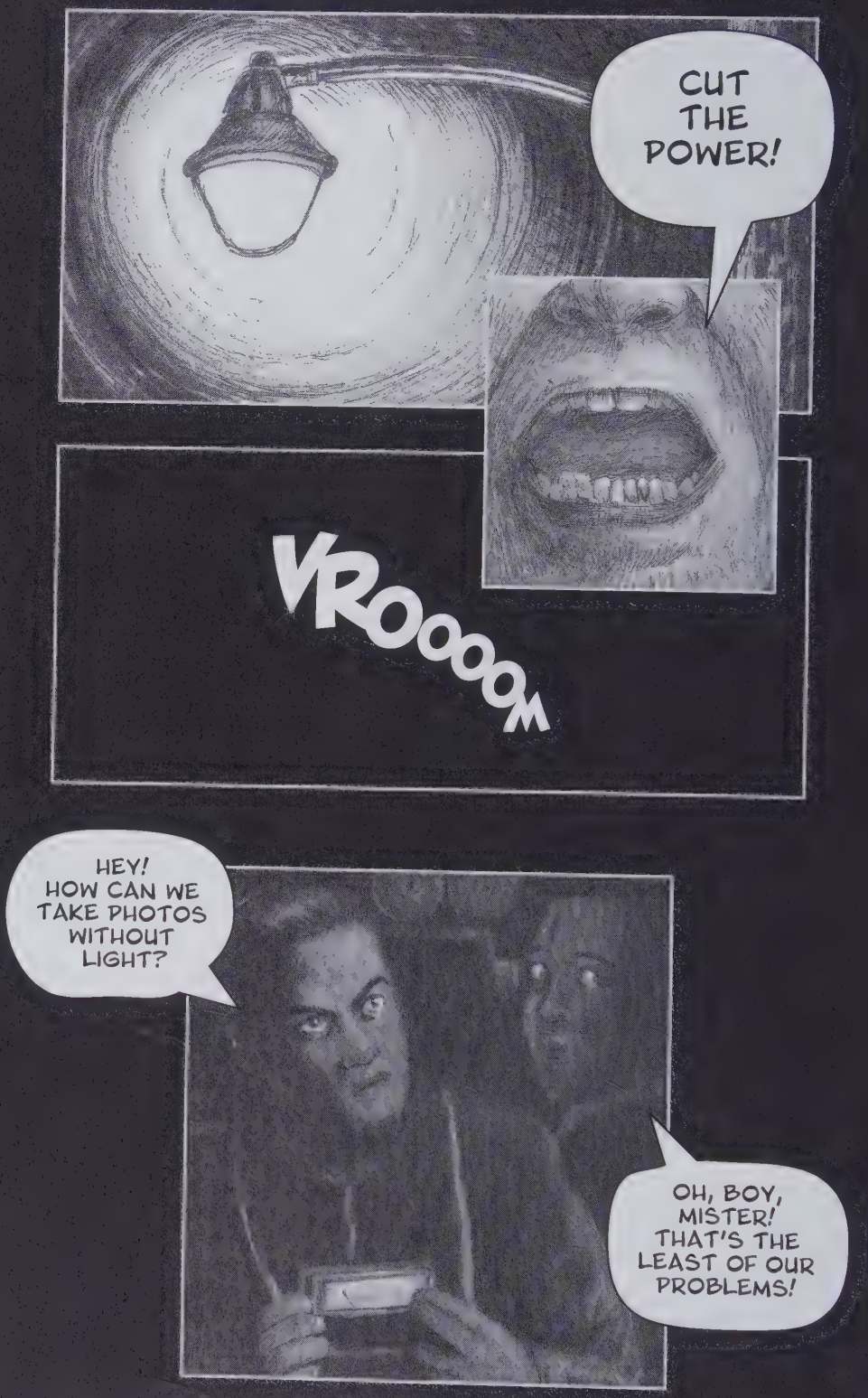
We shall overcome...
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome
someday.
Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe that,
We shall overcome
someday.
We are not afraid...



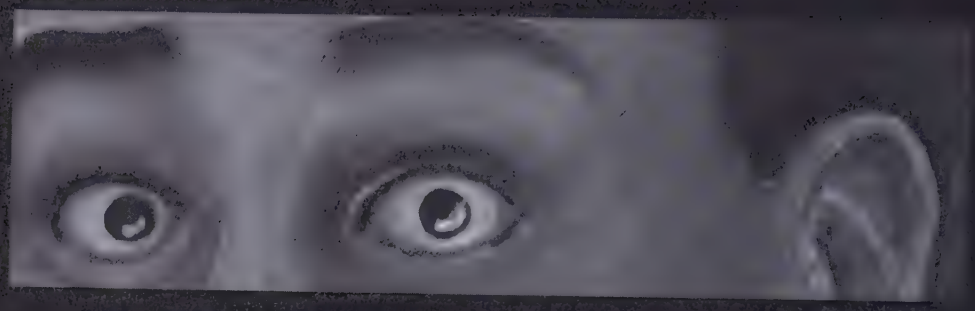
we are not afraid today...


YOU CAN STOP RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE. THERE'S NOT GONNA BE ANY MARCH.
Oh, deep in my heart...
PARDON ME, WE'RE JUST EXERCISING OUR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS.
CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS? LISTEN TO THE BIG CITY NIGGER WITH HIS BIG CITY WORDS!
...I do believe that we shall overcome someday.
I GOT NEWS FOR YOU, BOY: YOU AIN'T GOT NO CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS IN MY JURISDICTION!
SIR, WE'RE AMERICAN CITIZENS!

DON'T YOU LECTURE ME, NIGGER.
OKAY, FELLAS. THEY'RE NOT PLAYING AROUND. ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN, SO BE READY.


CUT THE POWER!
VROOOOM
HEY! HOW CAN WE TAKE PHOTOS WITHOUT LIGHT?
OH, BOY, MISTER! THAT'S THE LEAST OF OUR PROBLEMS!

THE POLICE CLOSED IN ON THE PROTESTORS.



MY FATHER WITNESSED THE MADNESS.

EEEEEEEK!

WHACK

WHACK

WHACK

WHACKWHACKWHA

NO! STOP! STOP!
SLAM
AAAAOOO!
HELP! THEY'RE GONNA KILL HIM!
CRACK
KWHACKWHACKWH

THE HOSTILE MOB TURNED ON THE REPORTERS.
LET'S BREAK SOME CAMERAS AND CRACK SOME HEADS.
YOU THINK YOU'RE SOMETHING ELSE, DON'T YOU?
YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A SORRY NIGGER LOVER, AND I'M GONNA BEAT YOUR NIGGER-LOVING ASS TO A PULP.

THEY VANDALIZED PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT.

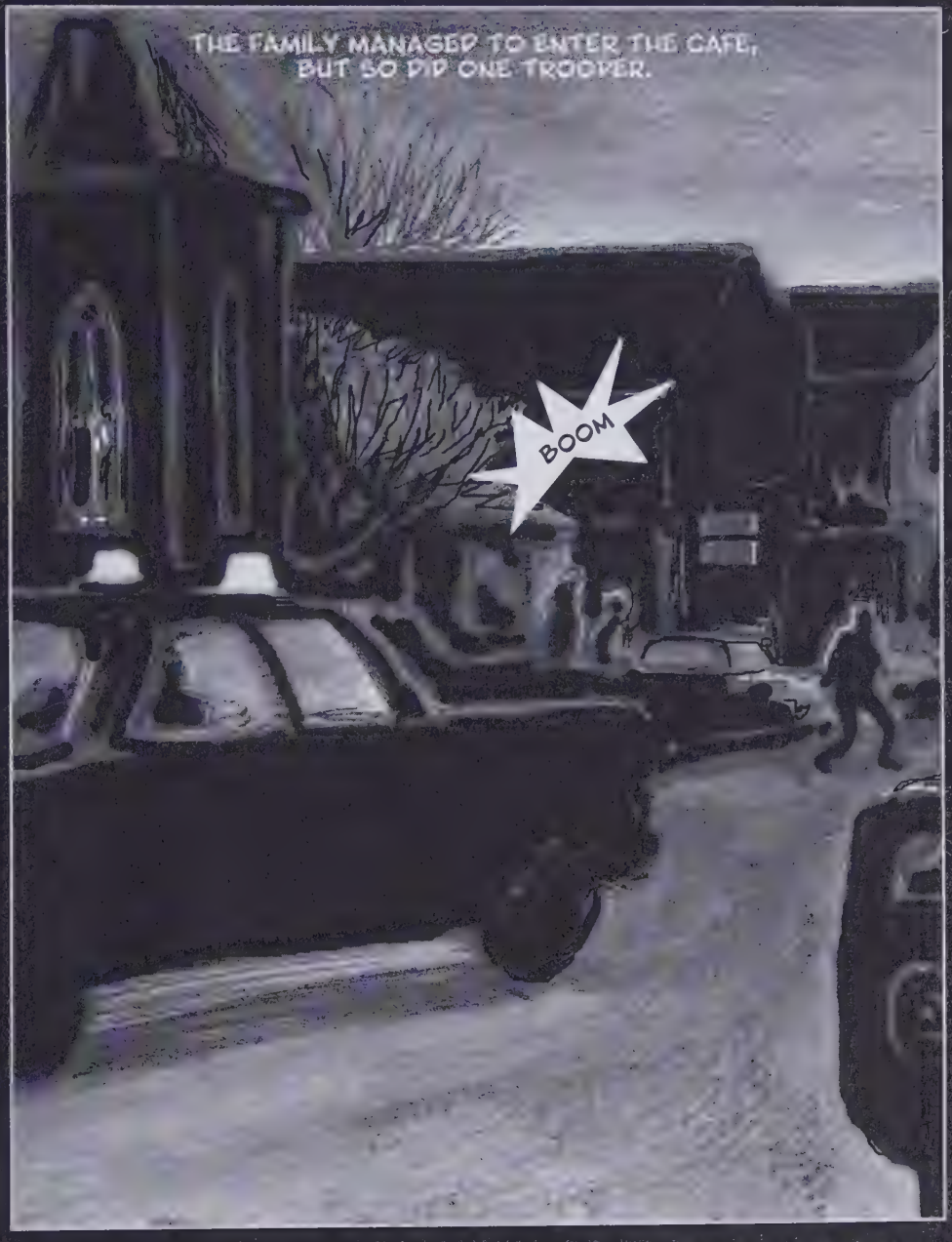
SMASH
MY FATHER REALIZED THAT HIS EQUIPMENT COULD BE NEXT. BEFORE HE TOOK OFF RUNNING, THE LAST THING HE SAW...
...WAS A CLUB COMING DOWN ON RICHARD VALERANI'S HEAD.
CRACK

THE MOB HARDLY PAUSED IN ITS RAMPAGE.

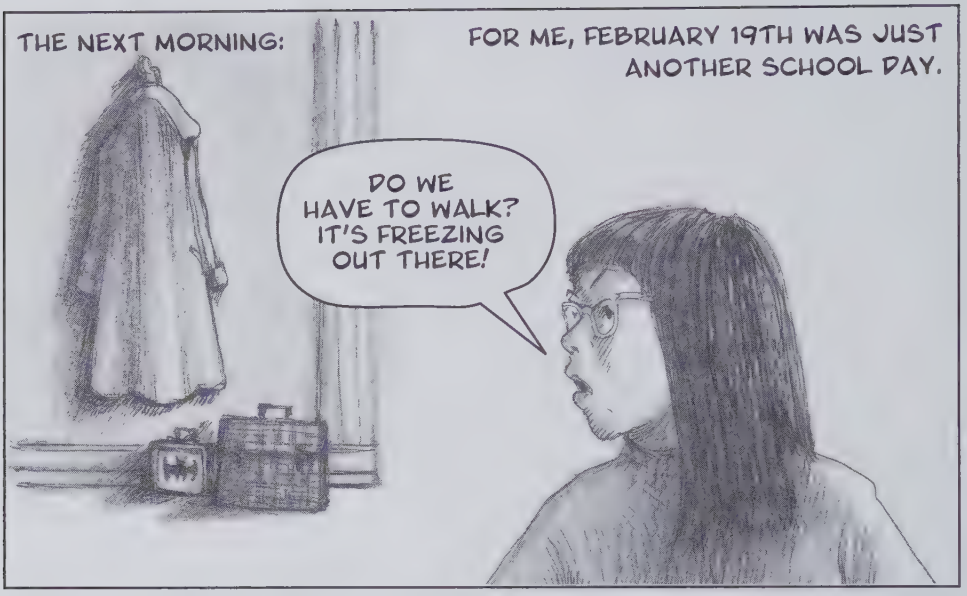
EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS ARE CLEAR: POLICE OFTEN STOOD BY, GIVING TACIT APPROVAL.

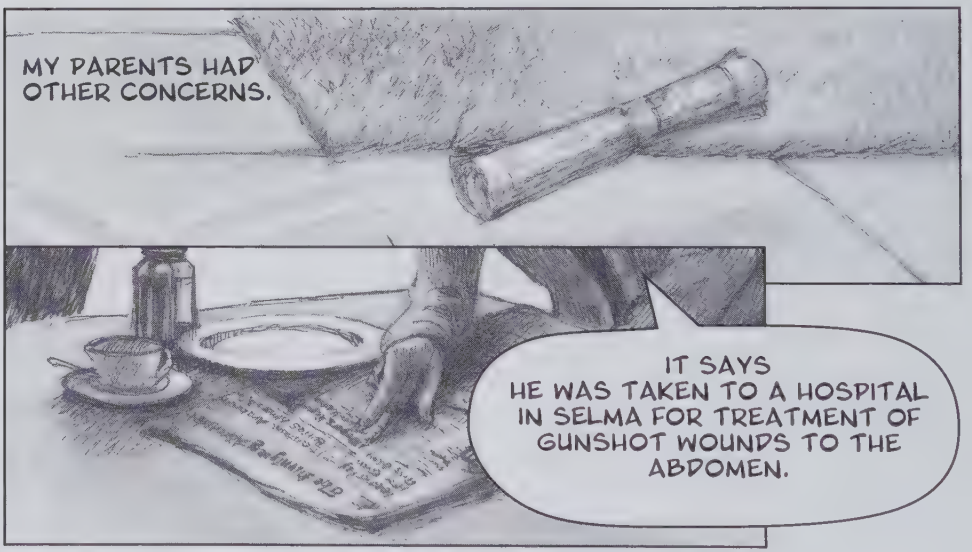
IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS CHAOS, A YOUNG MAN NAMED JIMMIE LEE JACKSON HUSTLED HIS MOTHER AND GRANDFATHER TOWARD SAFETY.

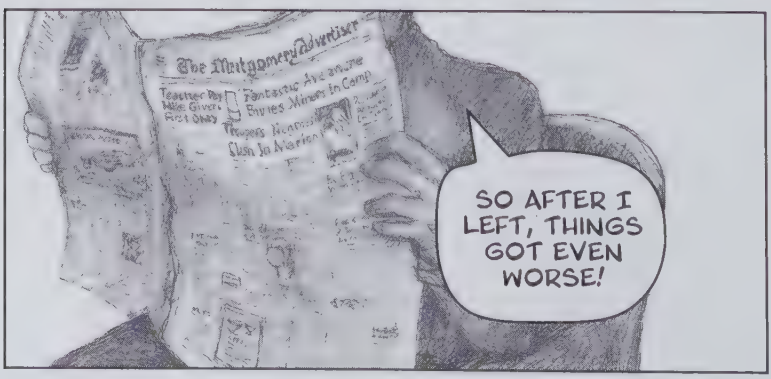
STATE TROOPERS CHASED THEM TO THE CAFE'S DOOR.



A SHOT IN THE DARK.

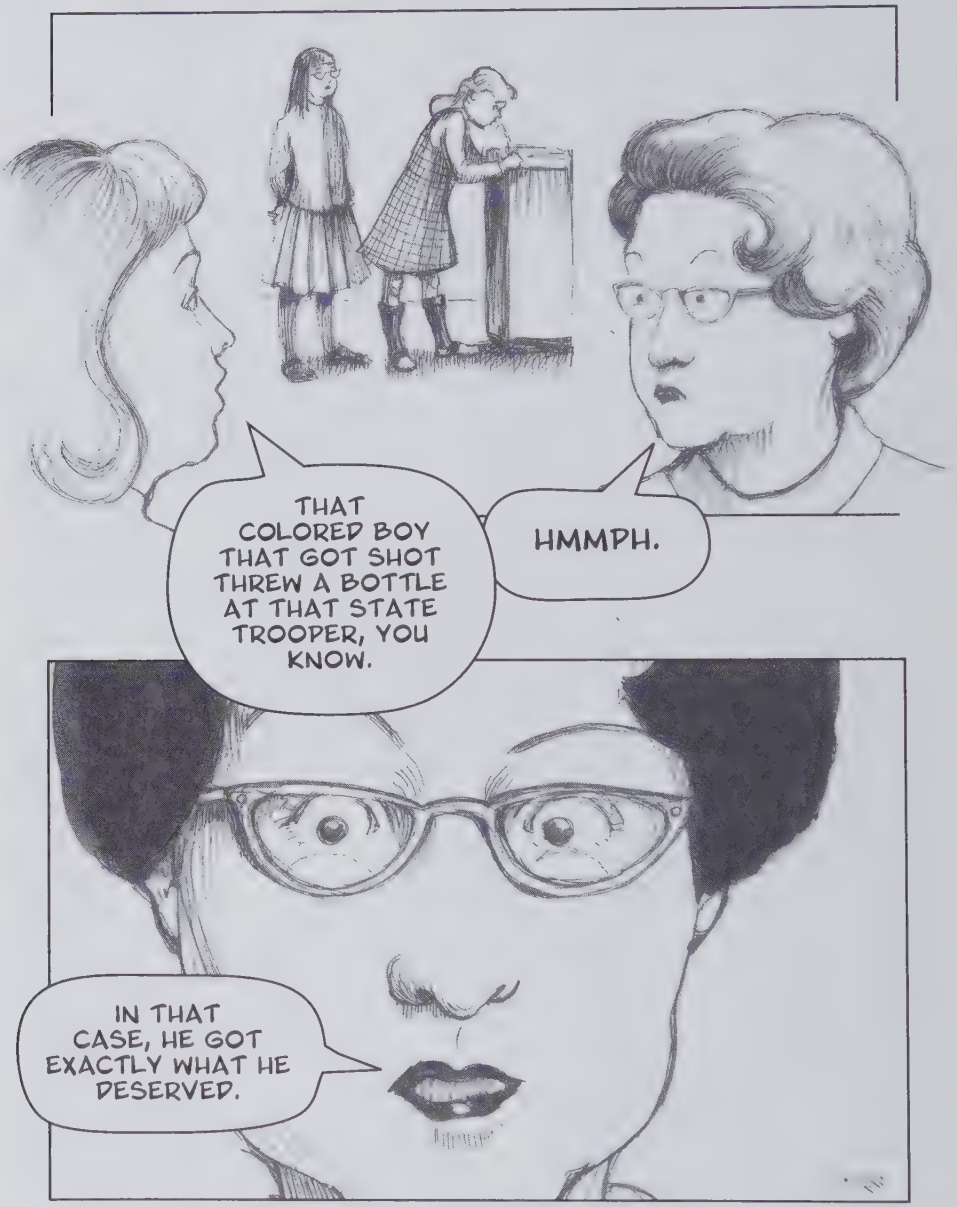

THE NEXT MORNING:
FOR ME, FEBRUARY 19TH WAS JUST ANOTHER SCHOOL DAY.
DO WE HAVE TO WALK? IT'S FREEZING OUT THERE!


MY PARENTS HAD OTHER CONCERNS.
IT SAYS HE WAS TAKEN TO A HOSPITAL IN SELMA FOR TREATMENT OF GUNSHOT WOUNDS TO THE ABDOMEN.


The Montgomery Advertiser
SO AFTER I LEFT, THINGS GOT EVEN WORSE!

HAD WE PAID ATTENTON, WE MIGHT'VE SEEN A TRACE OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT'S MADNESS.
LOOK. MORE BROKEN GLASS.

AT SCHOOL, THE INCIDENT RECEIVED LITTLE NOTICE. BUT BY NOW, I KNEW WHAT SORT OF REACTION TO EXPECT.



FOR DECADES TO COME, THE STATE TROOPER WOULD INSIST THAT HE FIRED HIS GUN IN SELF-DEFENSE. THAT STORY PREVAILED AS THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE FOR OVER FORTY YEARS UNTIL 2007, WHEN HE RECEIVED A GRAND-JURY INDICTMENT. HE EVENTUALLY PLED GUILTY TO A CHARGE OF 2ND-DEGREE MANSLAUGHTER.

EVEN BEFORE JACKSON DIED, THE BLACK COMMUNITY SEETHED WITH INDIGNATION AT THE CLAIM OF SELF-DEFENSE.

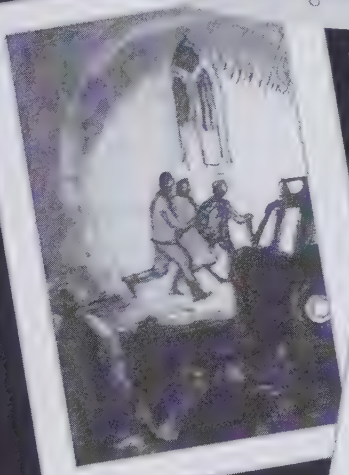
Negro Shot Eight Days Ag
Succumbs In Selma Hospital

By REX THOMAS

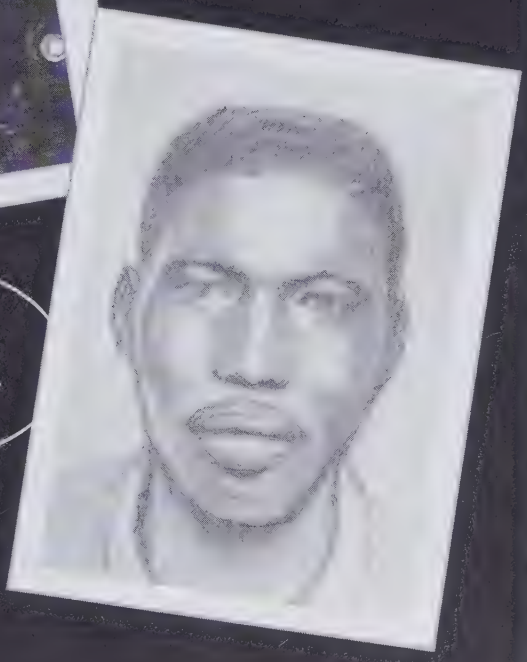
SELMA, Ala. (AP) — A Negro who said he was shot by a state trooper during a bloody night of racial violence became the first fatality Friday in Ala-bama's new civil rights strug-

when about 400 Negroes left a church and started marching to a county courthouse.

Jackson, who also had a two-inch gash on his head and bruises on his back, told ho-tal attendants that he ... beaten by a troo...



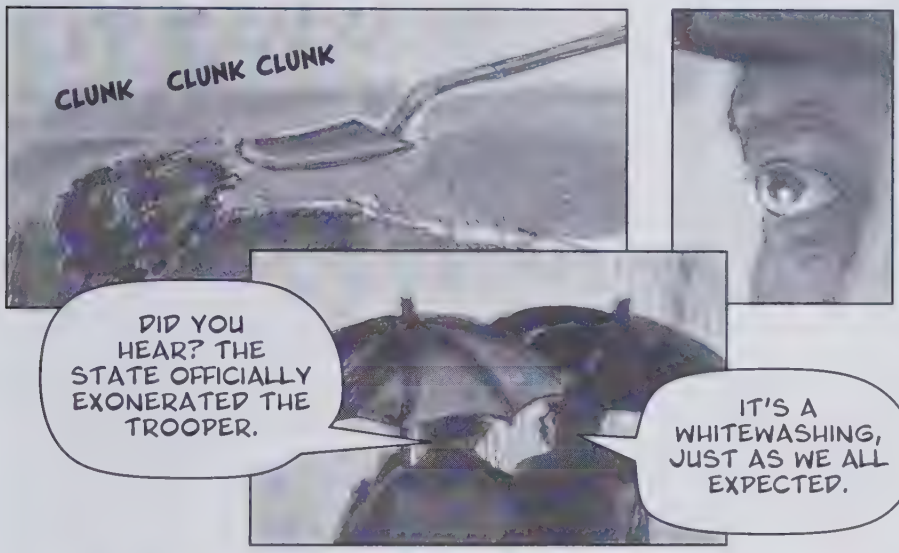
THEN NEWS CAME THAT HE'D LOST THE FIGHT.



JIMMIE LEE JACKSON, DEAD AT 26.

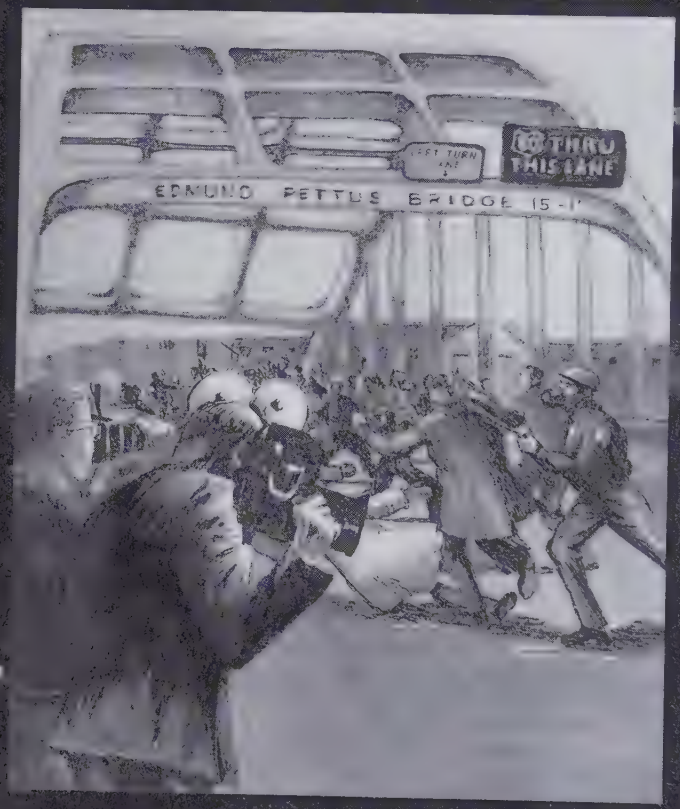
AS THINGS STOOD, THE VOTER-REGISTRATION DRIVE HAD YIELDED SO LITTLE PROGRESS.

BUT JIMMIE LEE JACKSON'S DEATH WOULDN'T BE FORGOTTEN.



THEY WOULD MARCH FROM SELMA TO MONTGOMERY BY THE HUNDREDS. WASHINGTON COULDN'T IGNORE THAT.

SELMA CHANGED EVERYTHING.

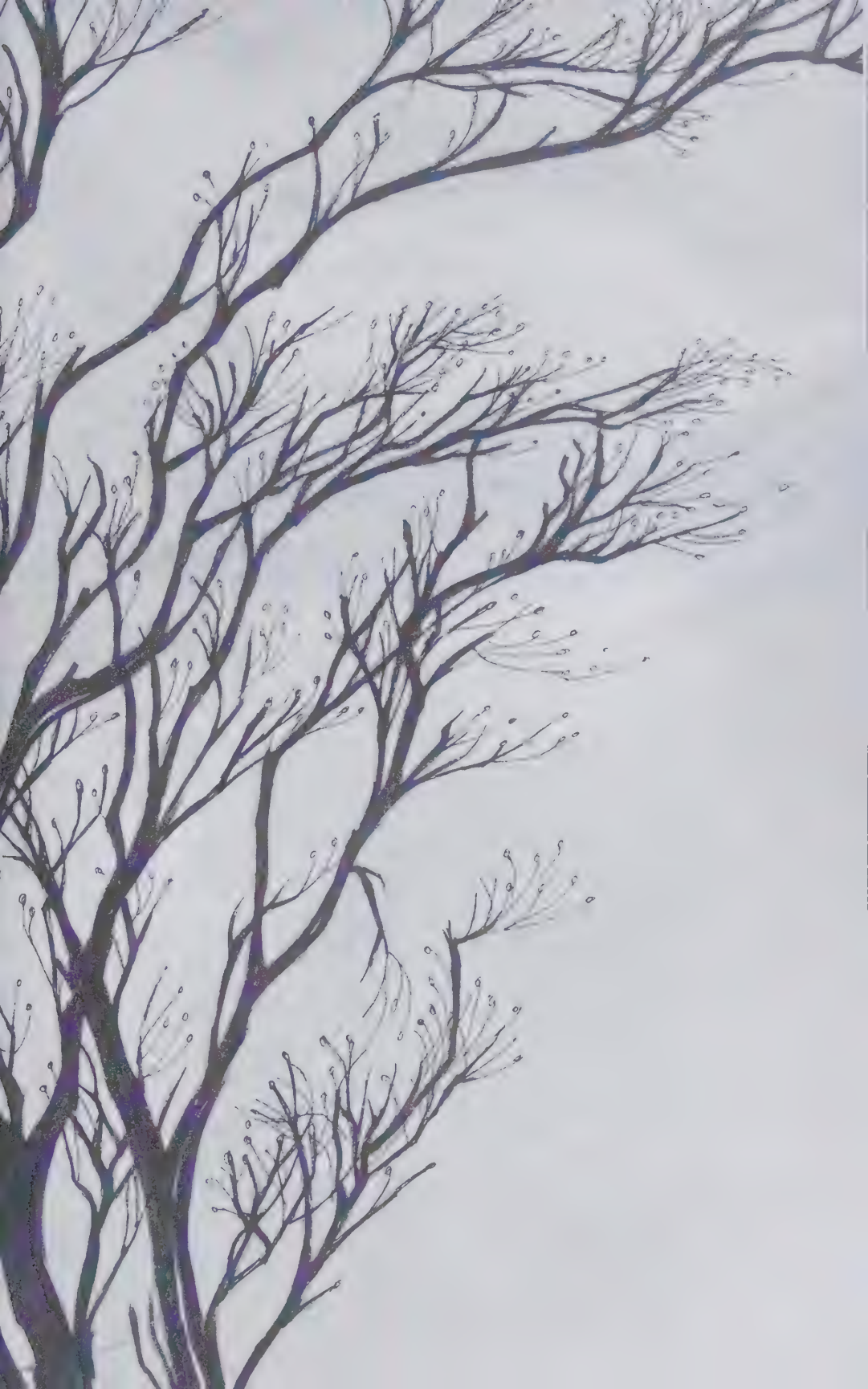


ON MARCH 7, 1965, THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO MARCH TO MONTGOMERY EXPOSED SOUTHERN POLICE BRUTALITY AS NEVER BEFORE.

THE SUN SHONE. CAMERAS ROLLED. ALABAMA STATE TROOPERS BEAT MARCHERS IN PLAIN VIEW.

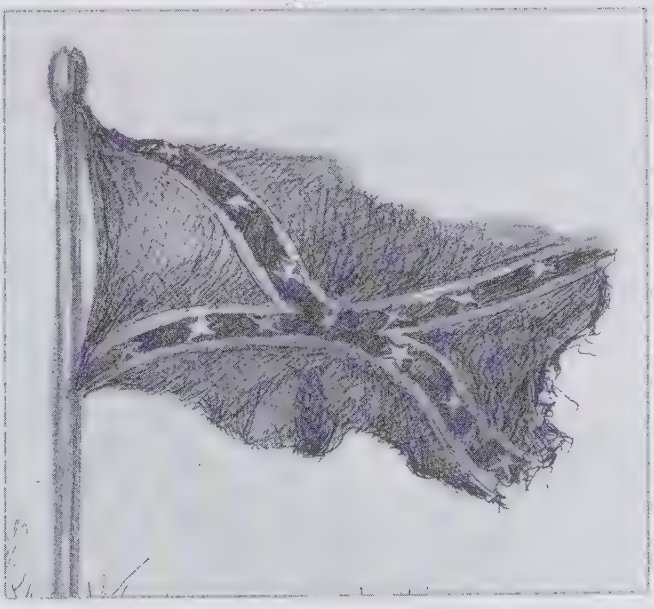
AT LAST, THE WORLD SAW.

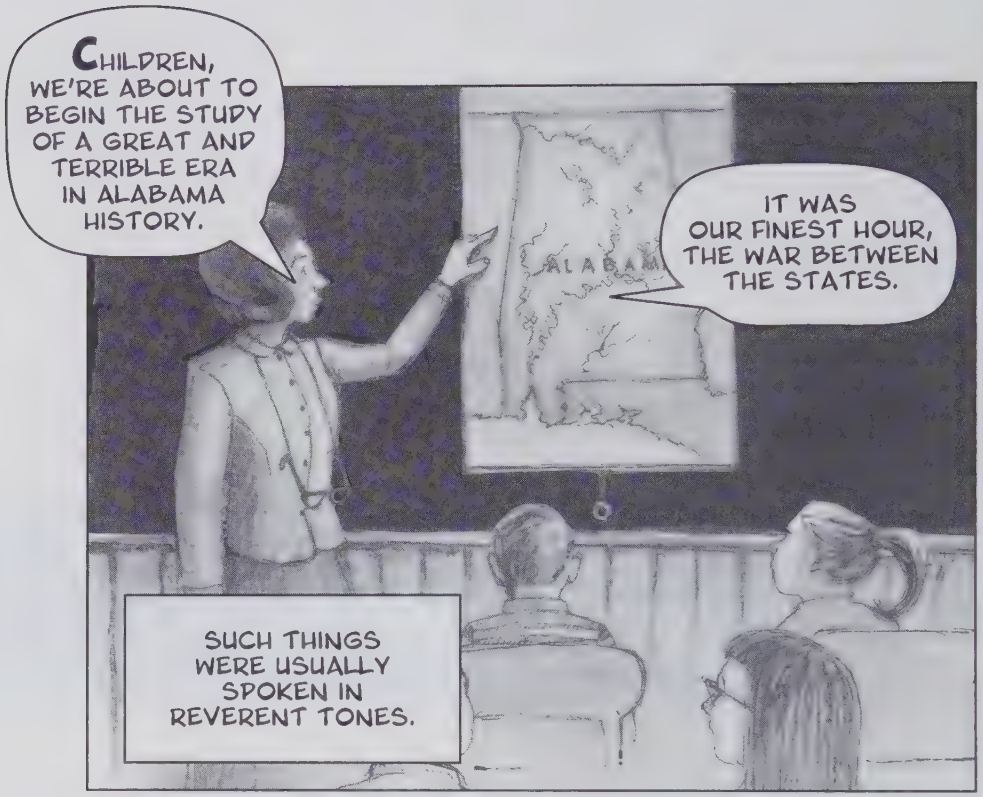
THE THIRD ATTEMPT TO MARCH TO MONTGOMERY SUCCEEDED. BY NOW, IT WAS ALMOST APRIL, AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1965 WAS ON ITS WAY TO BECOMING LAW.



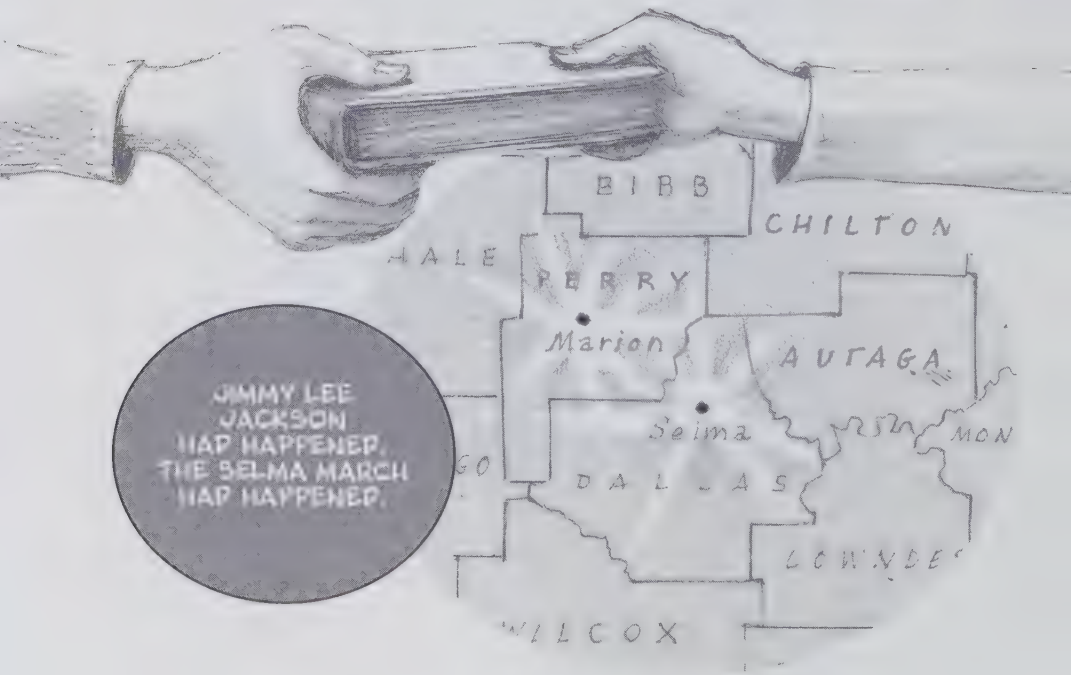
chapter 9

KNOW ALABAMA

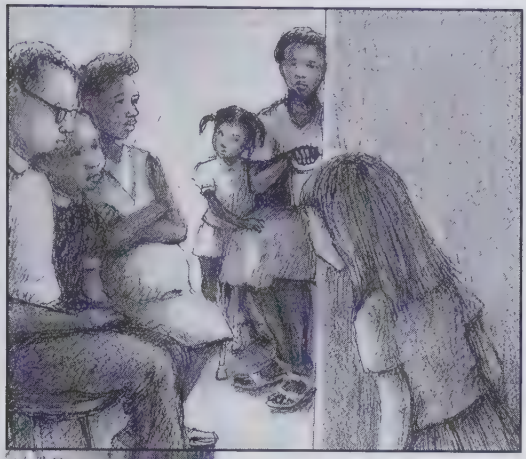




BY THE TIME MY 4TH-GRADE TEACHER PASSED OUT OUR *KNOW ALABAMA* TEXTBOOKS, TOO MUCH HAD HAPPENED FOR ME TO SWALLOW EVERYTHING THE AUTHORS CLAIMED.



I'D WITNESSED SEGREGATION; I'D SEEN RACISM.



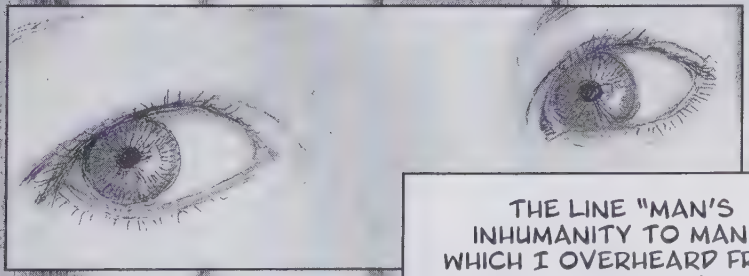
I'D READ GRUESOME BITS IN GINNY'S HISTORY BOOKS: SIEGE, INQUISITION, RAPE, ATROCITY.

MENGELE
THE BEAST OF AUSCHWITZ
J. McKINLEY

WRIGHT
NATIVE SON

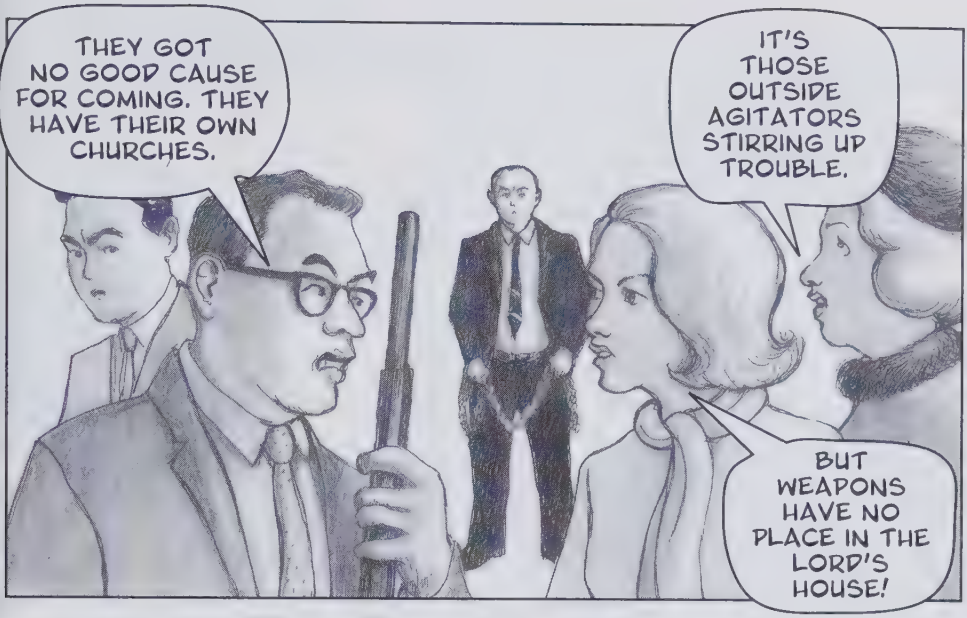
BLACK LIKE ME
GRIFFIN

THE

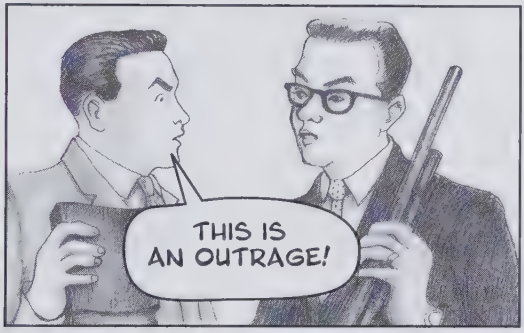


THE LINE "MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN," WHICH I OVERHEARD FROM GINNY, STUCK WITH ME, AND I WENT AROUND APPLYING IT TO THINGS NEAR AND FAR.

HOW STRANGE TO FIND INHUMANITY TO MAN AT CHURCH.
SILOAM BAPTIST CHURCH
YET, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT MY FATHER WITNESSED ONE SUNDAY DURING THE VOTER-REGISTRATION DRIVE OF 1965.
Announcements
Hymn: "Lead on O King Eternal" (Hymnal #621)
Scripture: Romans 1: 16-24
Offertory: "The King of Love My Shepherd Is"
Sermon: "I am not Ashamed"
Annie Graves
IN THE VESTIBULE, WHERE USHERS USUALLY PASSED OUT PROGRAMS...
...HE ENCOUNTERED DEACONS ARMED AGAINST INVASION.
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?
IT'S FOR YOUR PROTECTION, YOUNG LADY.
RUMOR HAD IT THAT BLACK ACTIVISTS INTENDED TO INTEGRATE WHITE CHURCHES, MUCH THE SAME WAY THEY CONDUCTED SIT-INS AT LUNCH COUNTERS.



I DON'T KNOW IF MY FATHER EXPRESSED HIS DISMAY VERBALLY...



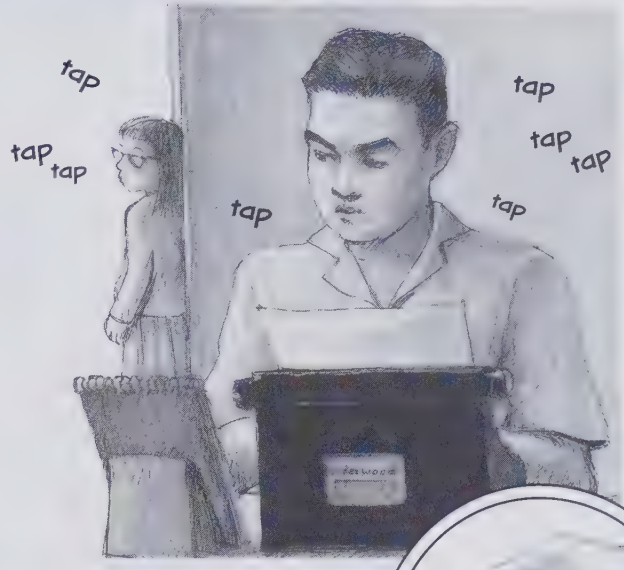
...OR, IF LIKE A HANDFUL OF OTHERS, HE SIMPLY WALKED OUT,

AND VOICED HIS FEELINGS AT HOME WHERE IT WAS SAFE.

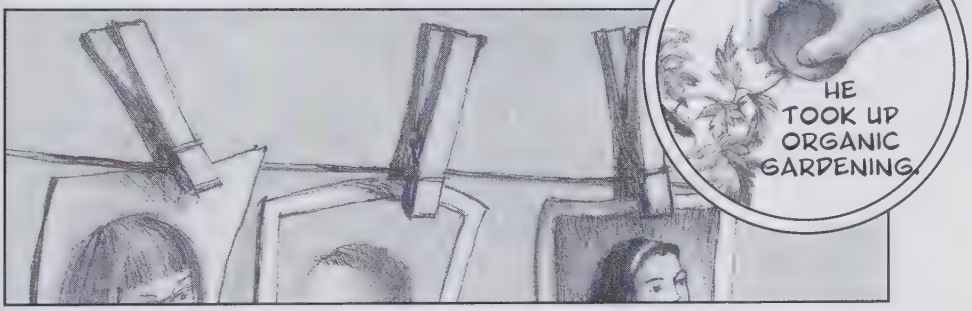
AT THE FAR END OF WASHINGTON STREET, WHERE MY FATHER WOULD HEAD NEXT, THE METHODISTS HAD THEIR HANDS FULL WITH AN OUTSPOKEN MINISTER.

SO THE METHODISTS DIDN'T PAN OUT EITHER, AND MY FATHER ABANDONED CHURCH ATTENDANCE FOR YEARS TO COME.

HE DEVOTED HIMSELF TO OTHER PASSIONS, SUCH AS THE POSTGRADUATE STUDY OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES.



HE TOOK PHOTOS.

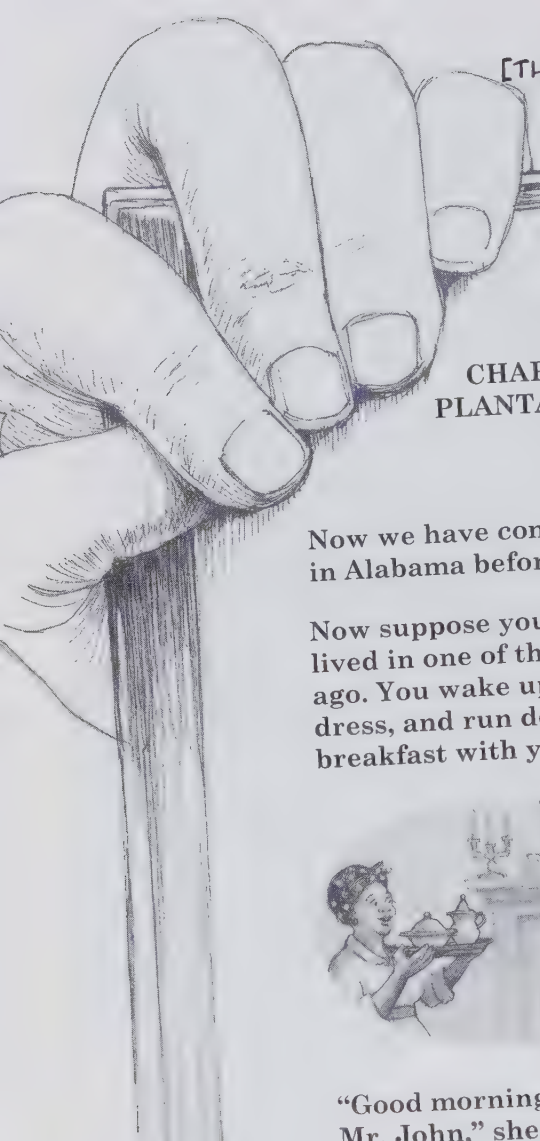


HE TOOK UP ORGANIC GARDENING.

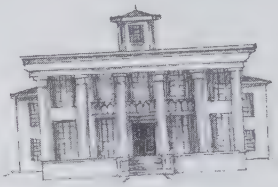
HE ENFORCED A HOUSEHOLD STANDARD OF ACADEMIC DEVOTION.

CONSEQUENTLY, I DID ALL MY SCHOOLWORK, NO MATTER HOW AWFUL THE TEXTBOOK, WHICH WAS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF *KNOW ALABAMA.*

[THE FOLLOWING EXCERPTS COME FROM THE TEXT OF *KNOW ALABAMA*, EXCLUDING ILLUSTRATIONS.]



CHAPTER VIII
PLANTATION LIFE



Now we have come to the happiest way of life in Alabama before the War Between the States.

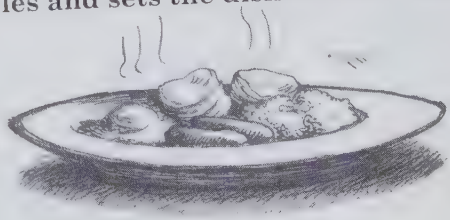
Now suppose you were a little boy or girl and lived in one of the plantation homes many years ago. You wake up early in the morning, bathe, dress, and run down the long stairs to have breakfast with your family.

The Negro cook whom you call "Mammy" comes in bringing a great tray of food. You have known her all your life and love her very much.

"Good morning, Miss Mary; good morning, Mr. John," she says.

"Good morning, Mammy," you reply.

And Mammy smiles and sets the dishes of hot food on the table.

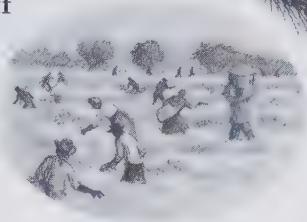


You eat a big breakfast because you are hungry and looking forward to a long day of fun on the plantation.

"You want to ride the fields with me today?" your father asks.

"Yes, sir," you answer, and you get on your horse.

You turn into the road beyond the iron gate and ride off toward the flat acres of cotton and corn fields. You can see Negroes working in the white cotton.



In these days of slavery, the plantation owners had many slaves. Most of them were treated kindly. There were a few masters who did not treat their slaves kindly.

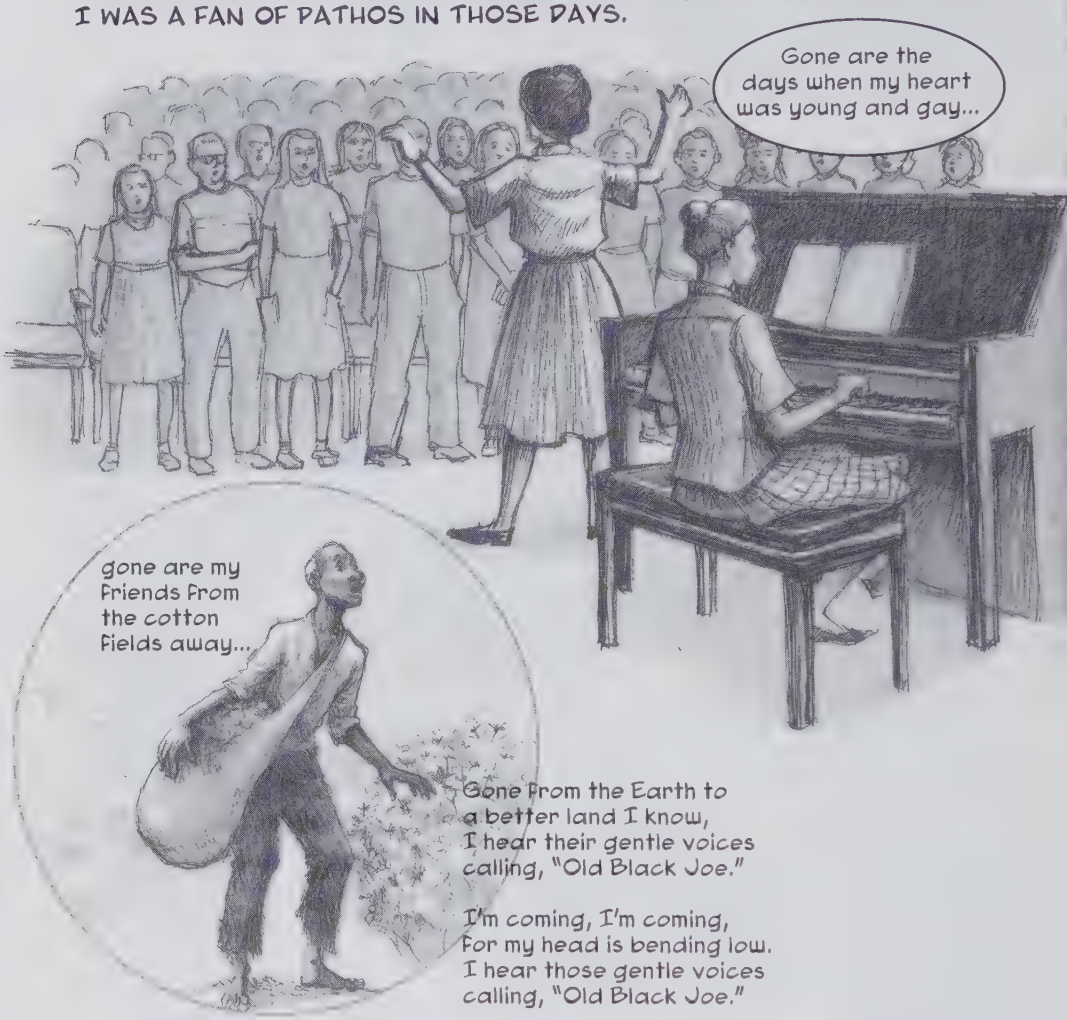
As you ride up beside the Negroes in the field, they stop working long enough to look up, tip their hats, and say, "Good morning, Master John."

You like the friendly way they speak and smile; they show bright rows of white teeth.

"How's it coming, Sam?" your father asks one of the old Negroes.

"Fine, Marse Tom, jes' fine. We got 'most more cotton than we can pick." Then Sam chuckles to himself and goes back to picking as fast as he can.

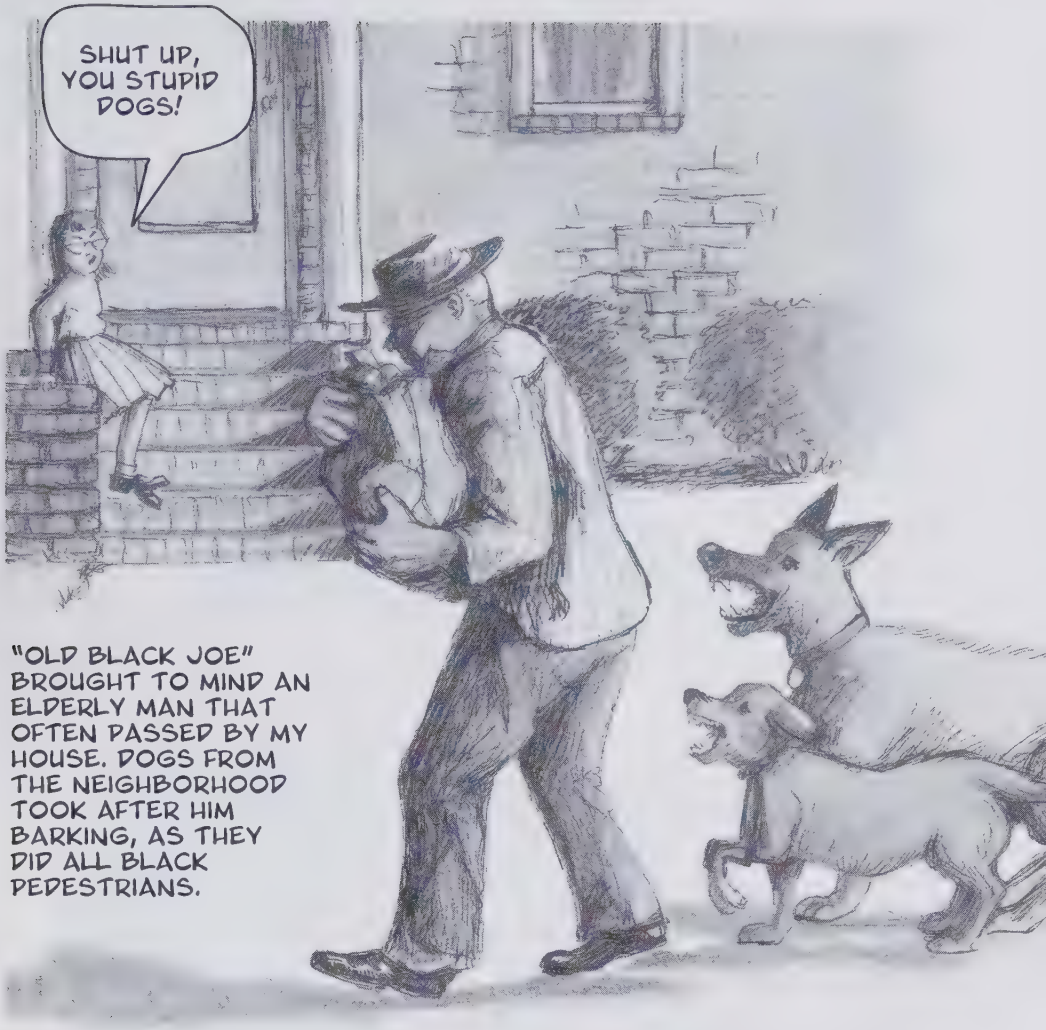
IN SCHOOL ASSEMBLY, WE SANG SONGS RANGING FROM PATRIOTIC TO FOLK. MY FAVORITE WAS "OLD BLACK JOE," BY STEPHEN FOSTER. I WAS A FAN OF PATHOS IN THOSE DAYS.



SOMETIMES I FELT A LUMP IN MY THROAT FOR POOR OLD JOE.

THE OLDER BOYS LOVED THIS SONG FOR THE COMIC OPPORTUNITY IT GAVE THEM. THEY ROUTINELY TURNED THE LAST LINE INTO A MOCK HOWL.

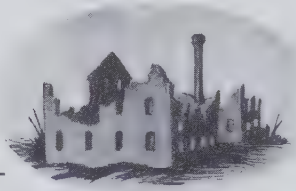
Oooooold Blaaaaaack Joooooooe!



THE MAN PAID THEM NO MIND. HIS FACE FROZE INTO A STOIC MASK AS HE SHUFFLED ALONG.

AS WE PROGRESSED IN OUR STUDY OF THE CIVIL WAR, THE TEXTBOOK BECAME EVEN MORE SURREAL.

RECONSTRUCTION



The things that happened in these years caused bad feelings--many more bad feelings than the war had caused.

"Carpetbaggers" were those people from the North who came to the South to live after the war....

Most of them were not honest men, and they came to steal and cheat people.

The "scalawags" were Southerners who turned against their own people in the South.

The state legislature in Montgomery was made up of "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags" and Negroes.

The loyal white men of Alabama saw they could not depend on the laws or the state government to protect their families.

[ALL EXCERPTS COME FROM THE TEXT OF KNOW ALABAMA, EXCLUDING ILLUSTRATIONS.]

A band of white-robed figures appeared on the streets of Pulaski, Tennessee. No one knew who they were.

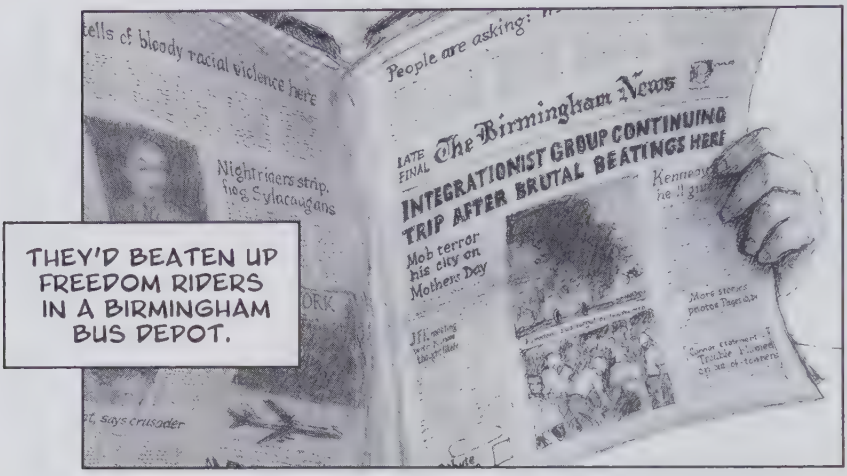
The Klan did not ride often, only when it had to.

They held their courts in the dark forest at night; they passed sentence on the criminals and carried out the sentence.

The sign of the Klan was a large fiery cross. Whenever the cross was seen burning on a hillside at night, people knew that the Klan had struck again.

Sometimes in the quiet night the sound of galloping horses would be heard in the streets; the Klansmen would pass like ghosts and disappear.

EVER SINCE OUR ARRIVAL IN ALABAMA, WE'D HEARD PLENTY OF KLAN STORIES.



THEY'D BEATEN UP FREEDOM RIDERS IN A BIRMINGHAM BUS DEPOT.

THEY'D BOMBED THE SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH IN BIRMINGHAM, KILLING FOUR CHILDREN IN THE PROCESS.

Denise McNair, 11

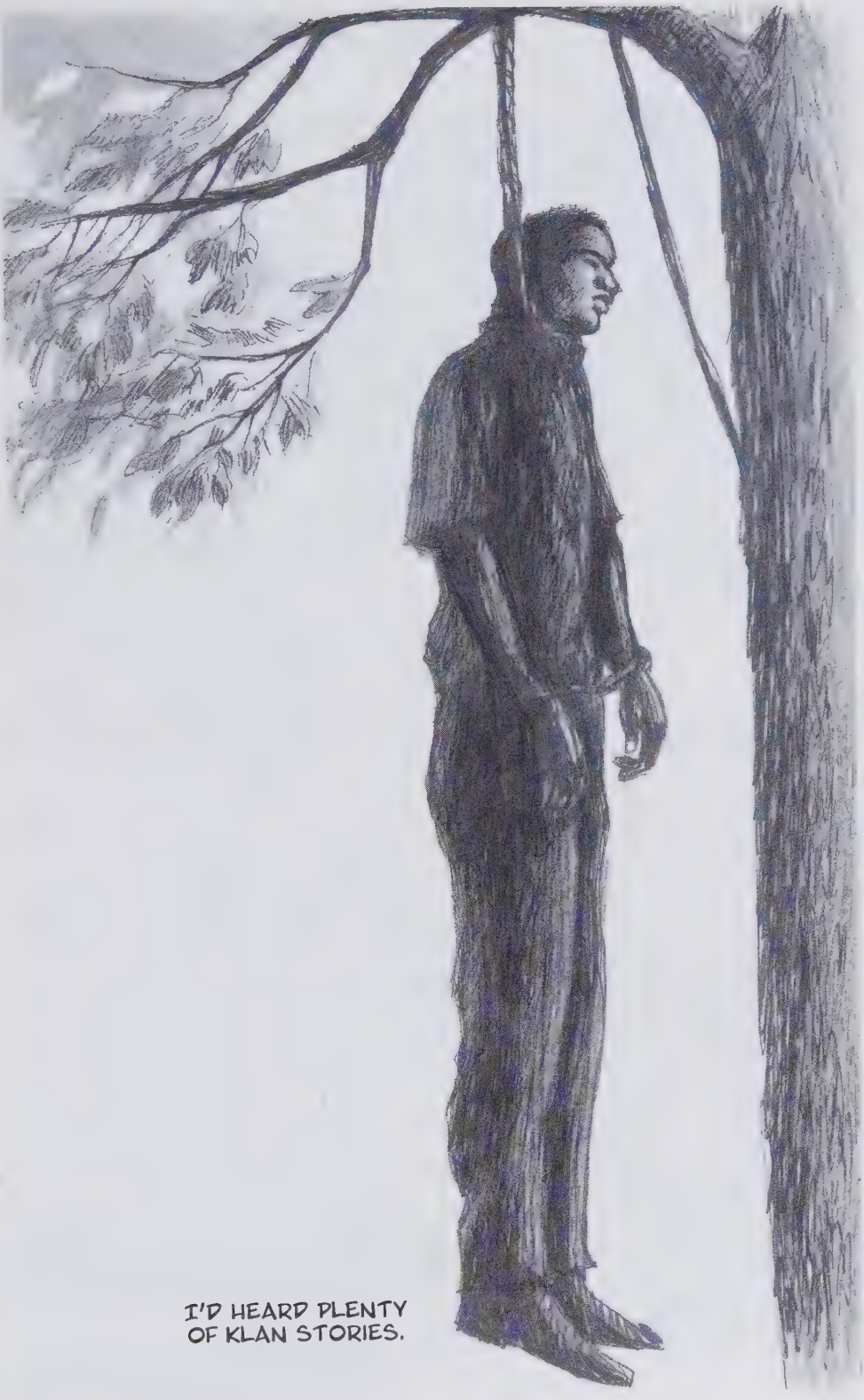
Carole Robertson, 14

Addie Mae Collins, 14

Cynthia Wesley, 14

MOST RECENTLY, THEY'D GUNNED DOWN CIVIL RIGHTS VOLUNTEER VIOLA LIUZZO AS SHE AND HER PASSENGER DROVE ALONG A DARK HIGHWAY.

THESE THINGS HAPPENED LESS THAN A TWO-HOUR DRIVE FROM OUR HOUSE.


I'D HEARD PLENTY
OF KLAN STORIES.

A NATIONAL MAGAZINE WE SUBSCRIBED TO PUBLISHED A FEATURE ON THE KLAN THAT INCLUDED A SHOCKING PHOTO.

THIS MILD-LOOKING FAMILY RAN COUNTER TO ALL MY PREVIOUSLY HELD NOTIONS ABOUT WHO WORE KLAN ROBES.

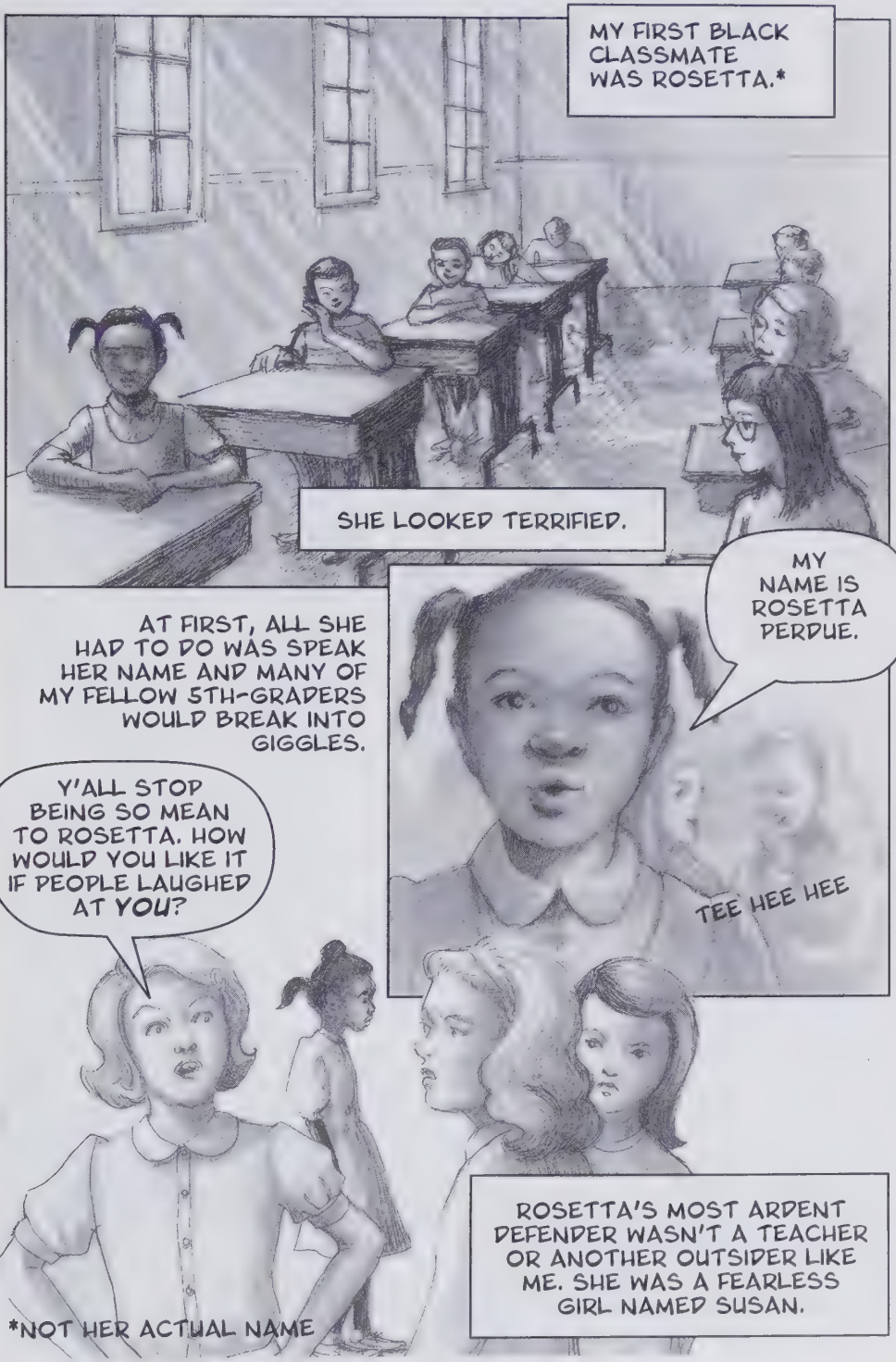
A GUY LIKE HIM.

BUT JUDGING BY THEIR FACES, THE KLAN COUPLE WASN'T VILLAINOUS. THEY BLENDED IN WITH THE RURAL, BIBLE BELT ALABAMA POPULATION I KNEW WELL.

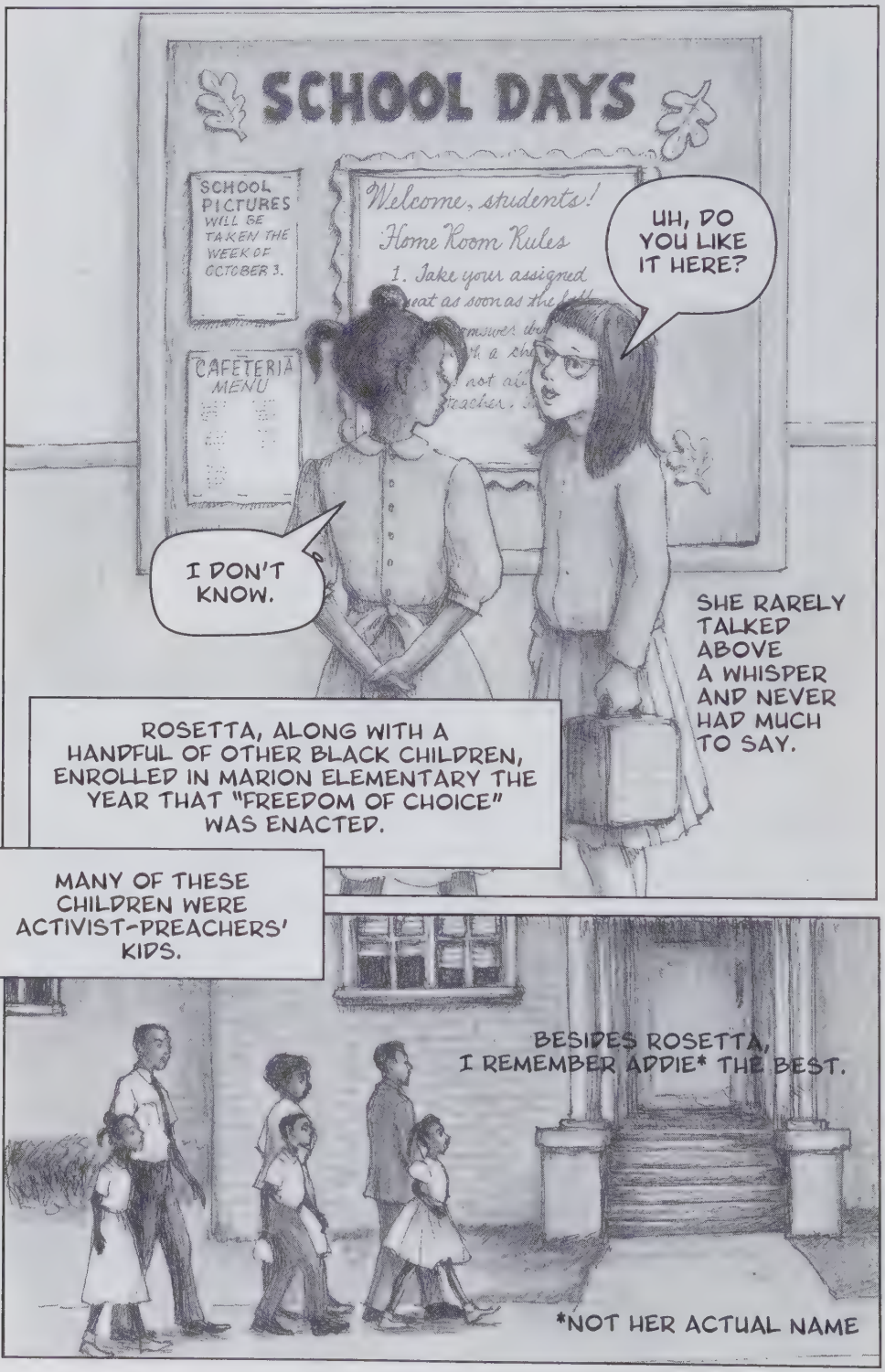
IT WAS ANOTHER PUZZLE PIECE IN THE ENIGMATIC SOUTH.

At the cross
at the cross
where I first saw the light
and the burden of my soul washed away
it was there by faith I received my sight
and now I am happy all the day.

TWELVE YEARS AFTER THE SUPREME COURT RULED THAT *SEPARATE* WAS IN NO WAY *EQUAL*, PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN PERRY COUNTY FINALLY TOOK A STEP TOWARD DESEGREGATION.

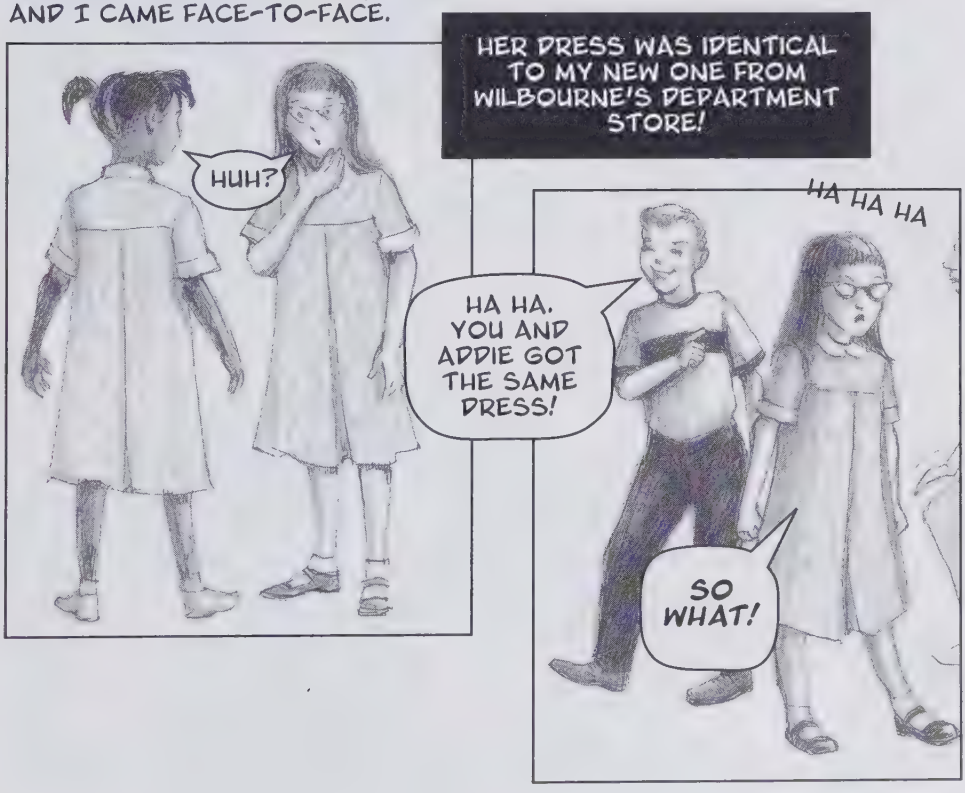


I WAS NO SUSAN. MY OVERTURES TOWARD ROSETTA WERE CLUMSY AND INEFFECTIVE.



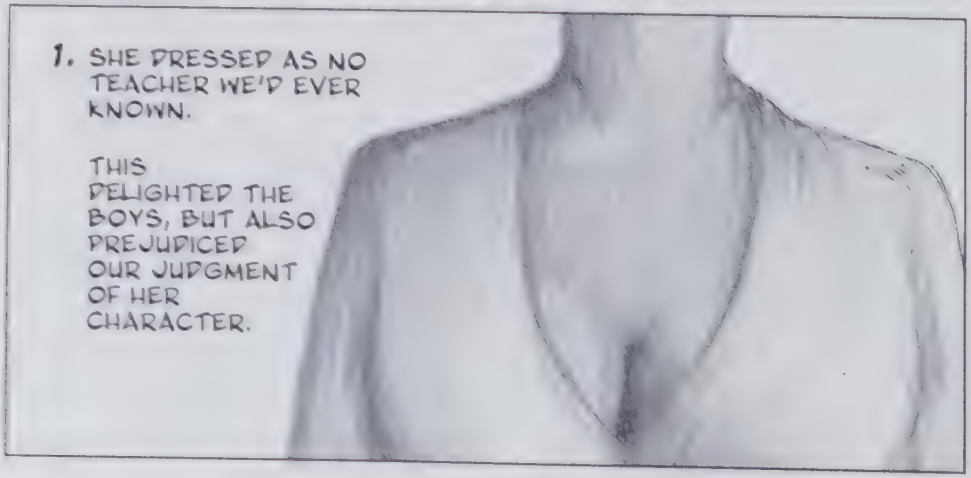
FOR ONE THING, SHE WAS AN ALL-A STUDENT, AND ALTHOUGH SHE WAS A YEAR OR TWO YOUNGER, SHE HAD ENOUGH FIRE FOR HERSELF ***AND*** ROSETTA.

ONE DAY BEFORE THE BELL FOR HOMEROOM SOUNDED, ADDIE AND I CAME FACE-TO-FACE.



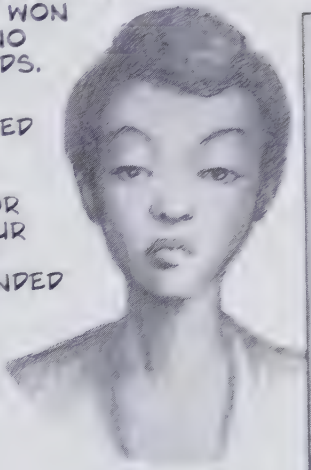
ONE DAY, THAT "FREEDOM OF CHOICE" YEAR, THE PRINCIPAL MYSTERIOUSLY CALLED A GROUP OF HONOR ROLL STUDENTS TO HIS OFFICE.

THE NEW LIBRARIAN, WHO WAS ALSO THE FIRST BLACK AUTHORITY FIGURE IN MY LIFE, HAD COMMITTED A SERIES OF ERRORS.



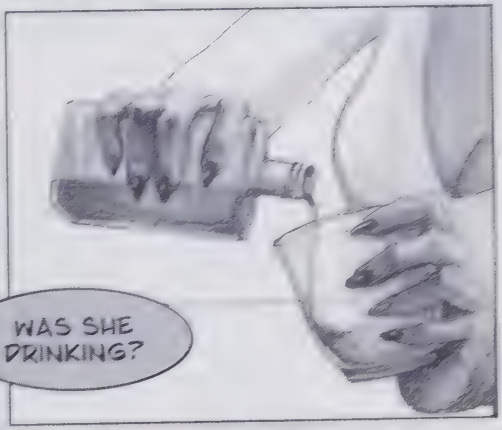
2. SHE REGARDED US ALL WITH A STONY GLARE THAT WON HER NO FRIENDS.

I SENSED THAT THE COLOR OF OUR SKIN OFFENDED HER.

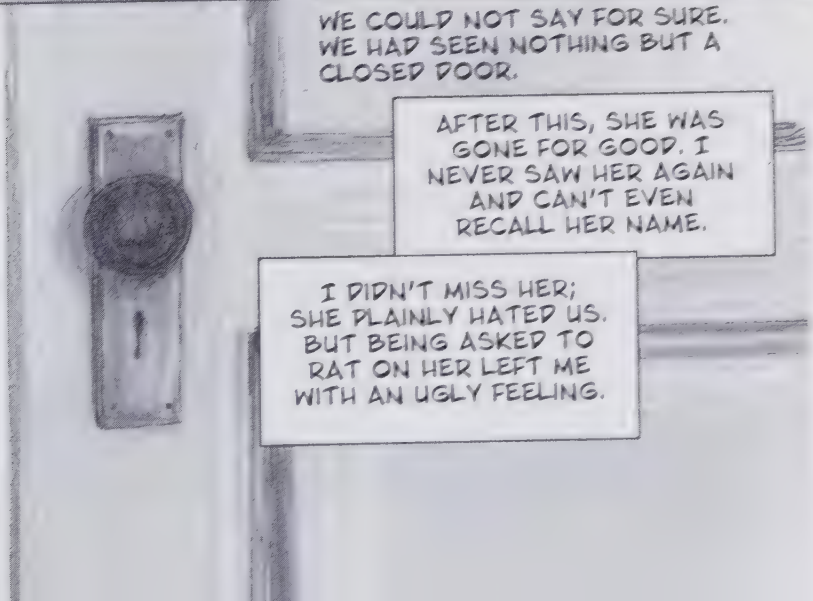


3. SHE HAD A HABIT OF DISAPPEARING INTO THE LITTLE OFFICE BEHIND THE CIRCULATION DESK.

IT WAS THIS DISAPPEARING ACT AND THE SPECULATION IT STIRRED THAT MOST INTERESTED THE PRINCIPAL.



WE COULD NOT SAY FOR SURE. WE HAD SEEN NOTHING BUT A CLOSED DOOR.

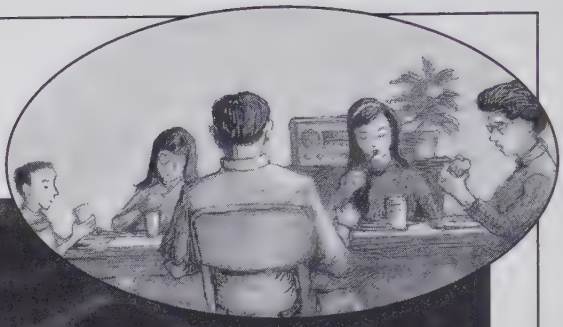


chapter 10

SCHOOL LESSONS

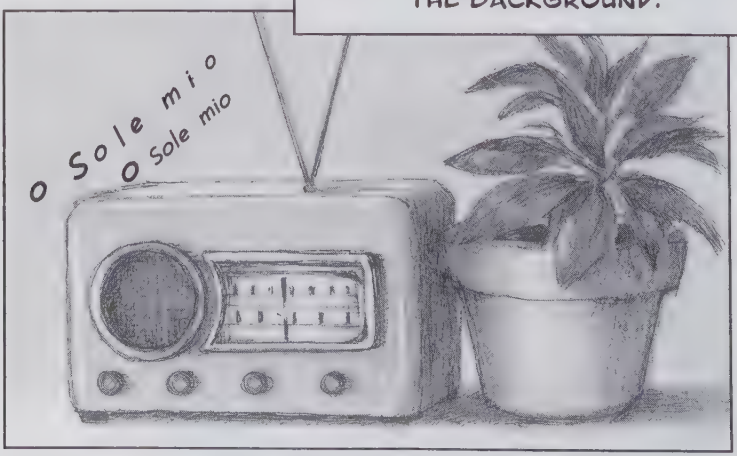
1968

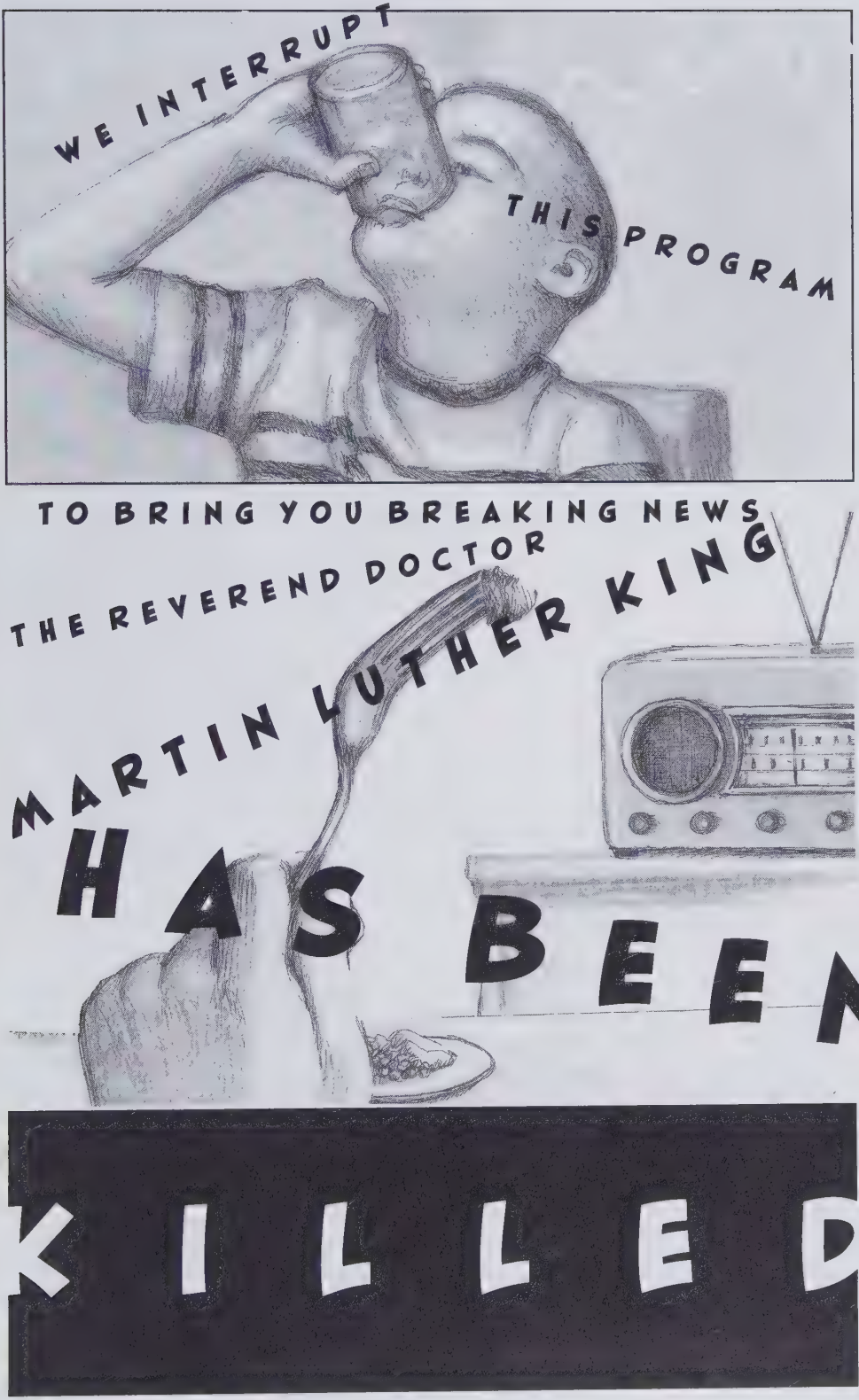
AN APRIL EVENING:



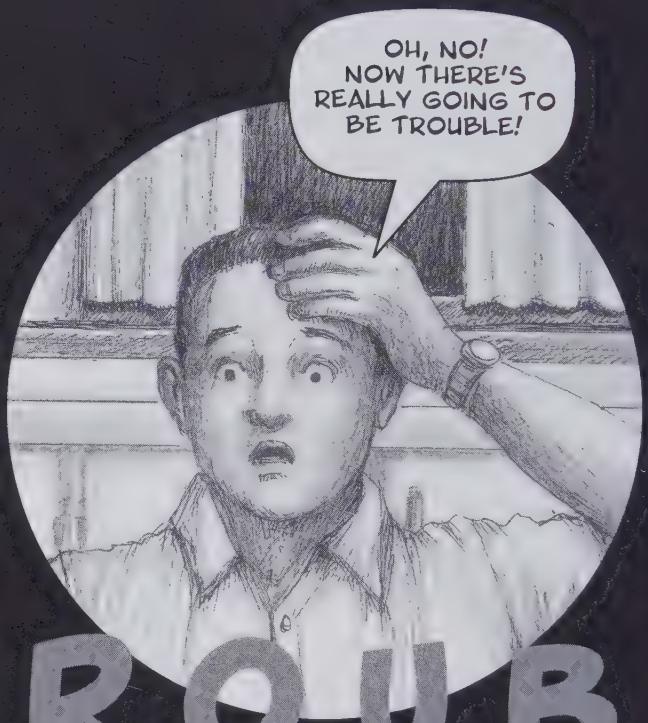
CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT THAT NIGHT REMAIN INDELIBLE.

WE WERE EATING DINNER. THE RADIO PLAYED IN THE BACKGROUND.




WE INTERRUPT
THIS PROGRAM
TO BRING YOU BREAKING NEWS
THE REVEREND DOCTOR
MARTIN LUTHER KING
HAS BEEN
KILLED

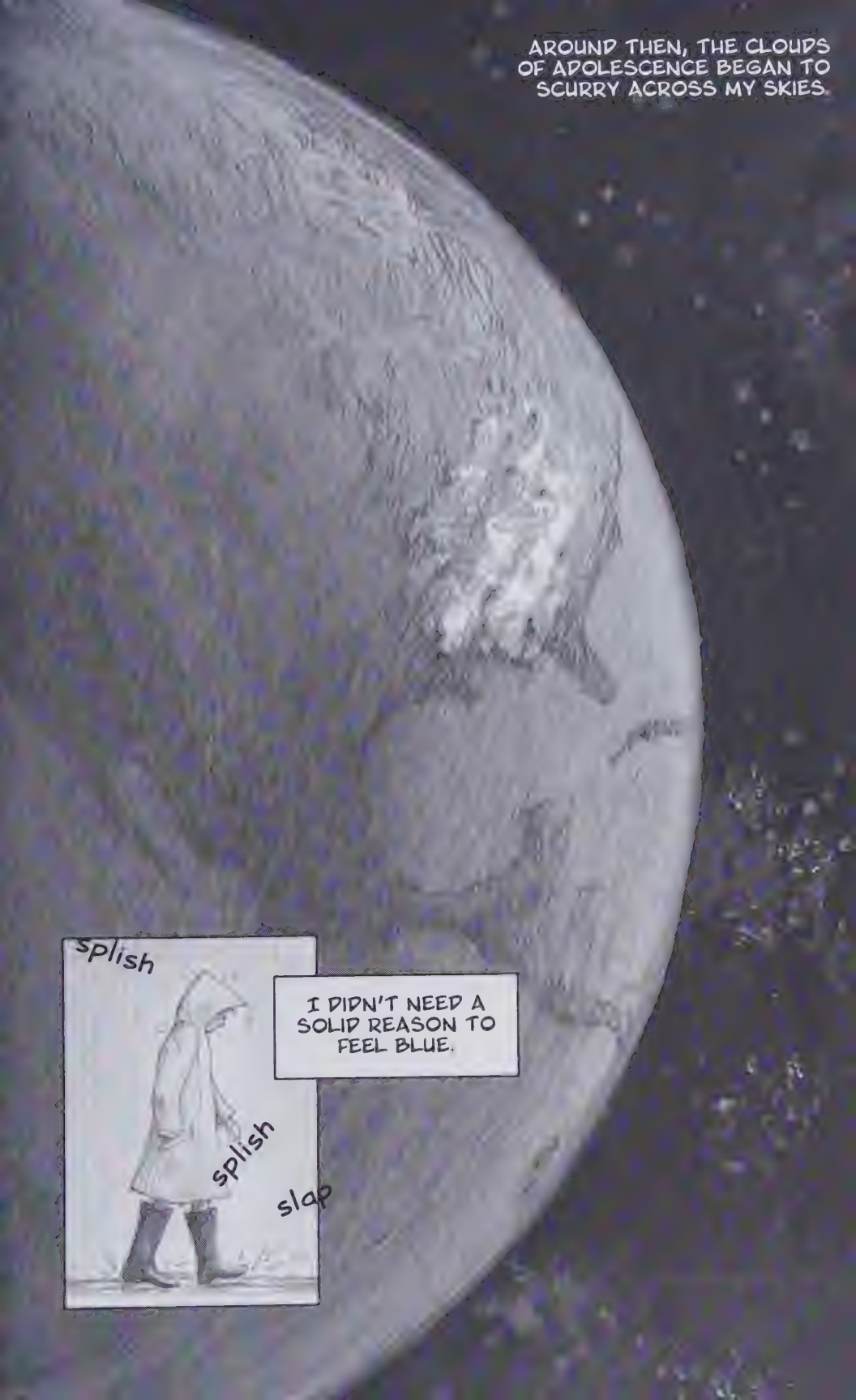
MY MIND'S EYE RECORDED DADDY'S EXPRESSION. HIS WORDS ECHO IN MY HEAD.



TROUBLE

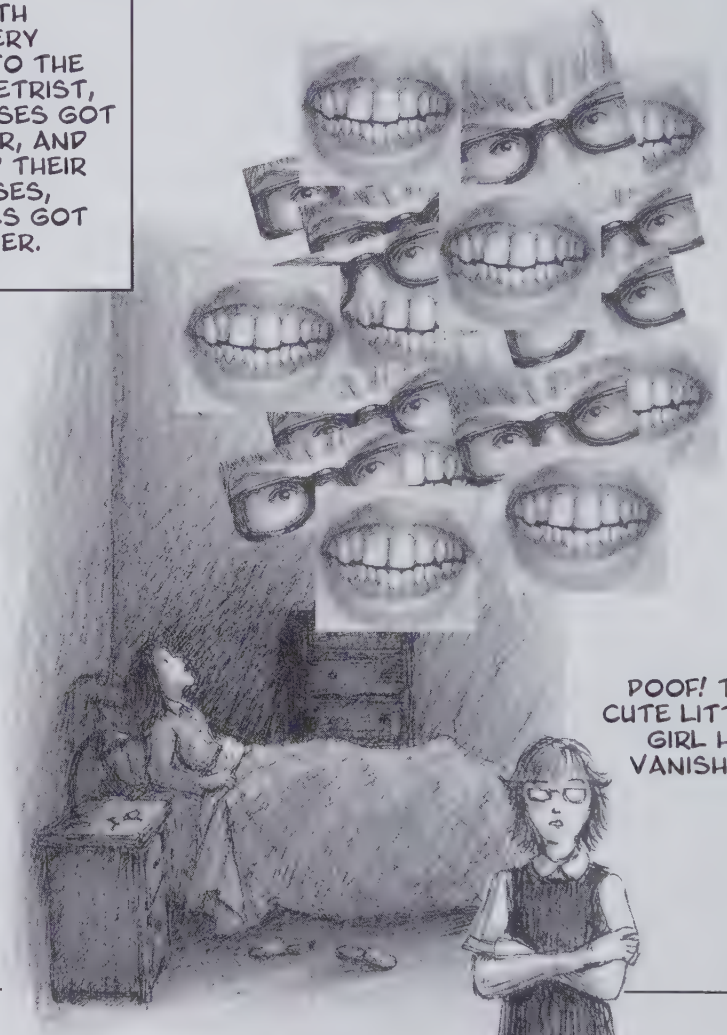
TROUBLE

BUT HIS PREMONITION DIDN'T COME TRUE. THOUGH OTHER CITIES BLAZED WITH OUTRAGE, MARION STAYED QUIET. IT LOOKED AS IF OUR DAYS OF TROUBLE WERE BEHIND US.


AROUND THEN, THE CLOUDS OF ADOLESCENCE BEGAN TO SCURRY ACROSS MY SKIES.
splish
I DIDN'T NEED A SOLID REASON TO FEEL BLUE.
splish
slap

BUT I FELT I HAD GOOD CAUSE FOR SELF-LOATHING WHEN I AWOKE TO THE SPECTER OF CROOKED TEETH AND SHRUNKEN EYES.

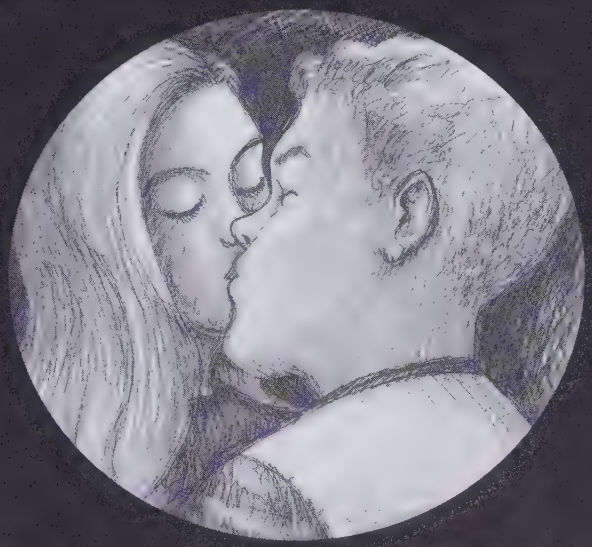
WITH EVERY VISIT TO THE OPTOMETRIST, MY GLASSES GOT THICKER, AND BEHIND THEIR LENSES, MY EYES GOT TINIER.



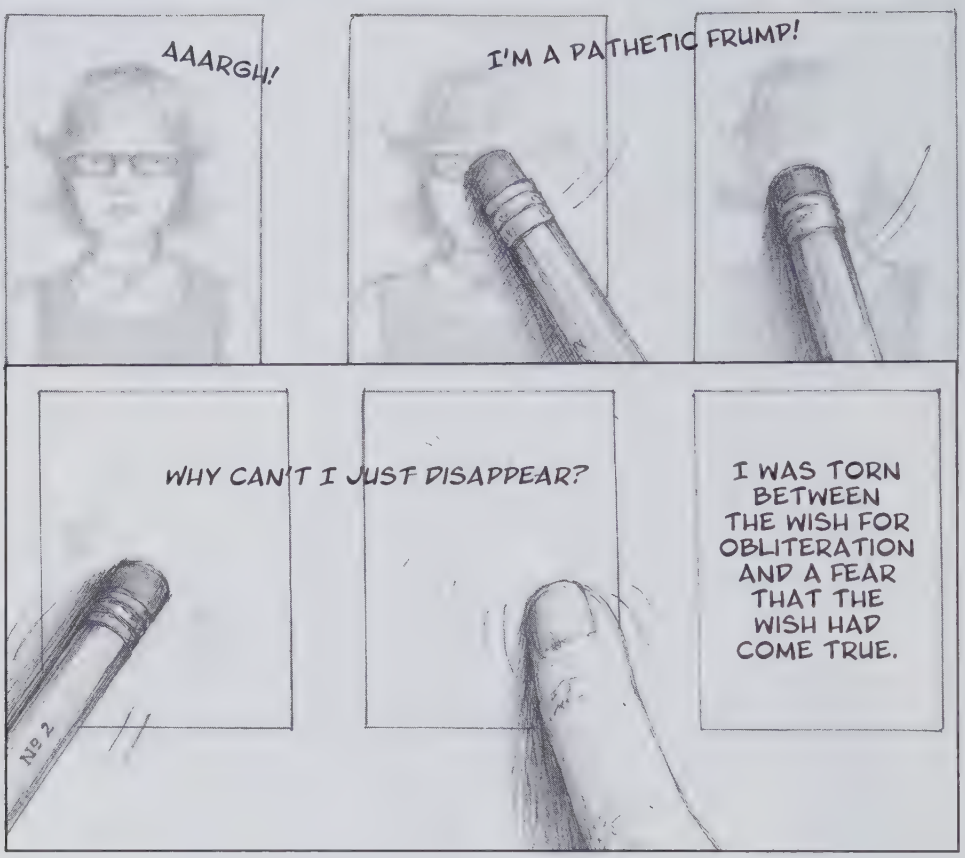
POOF! THE CUTE LITTLE GIRL HAD VANISHED.

THE HORMONAL SWITCH PRODUCED ITS OWN STRANGE EFFECTS, LIKE WHEN MY BANGS STARTED FLIPPING AT THE CORNERS. ***I HAD GROWN HORNS!*** NOW EVEN MY FAMILY THOUGHT I LOOKED WEIRD.

THIS HAPPENED AT THE WORST TIME, JUST WHEN LOOKS BEGAN TO MATTER LIKE NEVER BEFORE.

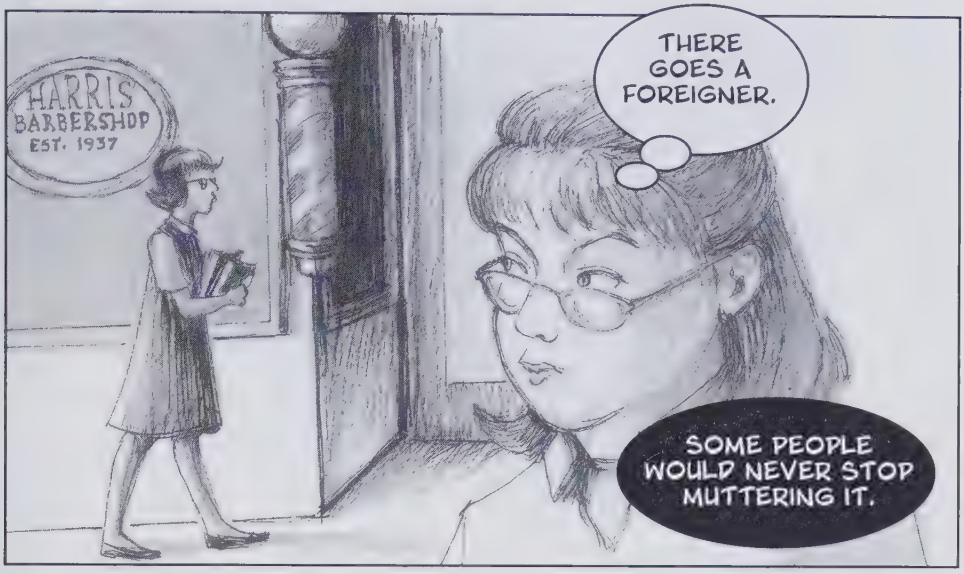


YOU HAD TO BE COOL AND BEAUTIFUL TO SECURE YOUR SPOT. I WAS NEITHER, AND BOY-GIRL PARTIES BECAME HELLISH REMINDERS OF THOSE DEFICITS.

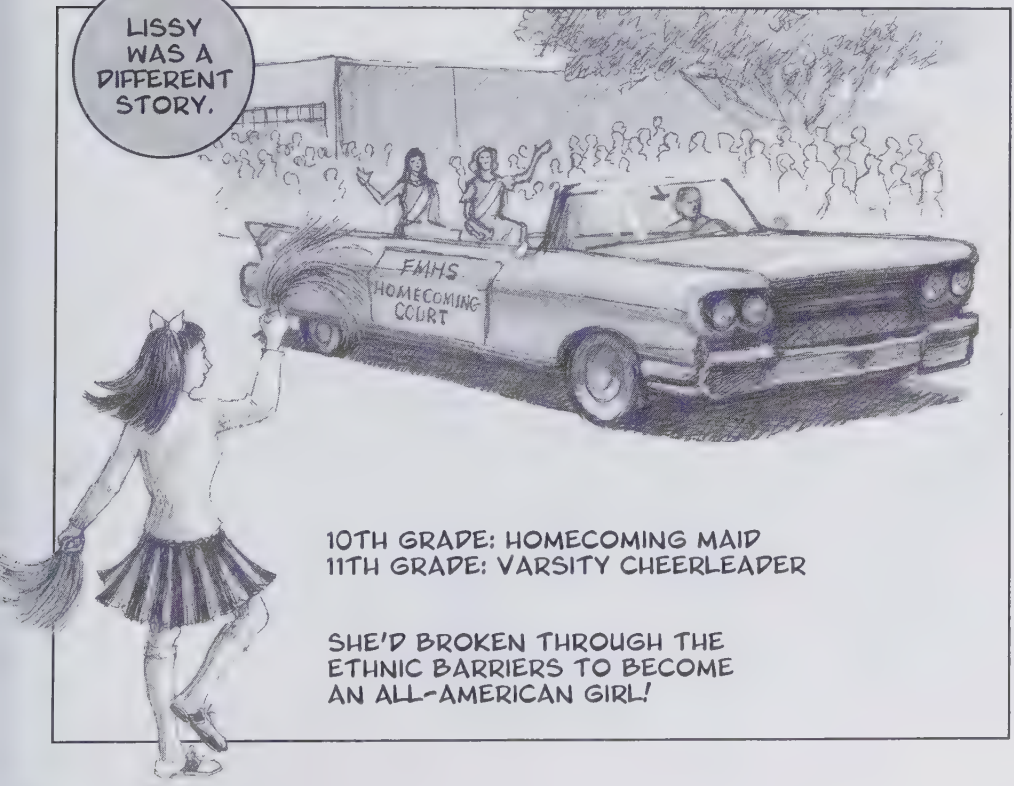


I HEARD ABOUT A RABBI FROM A NEARBY TOWN WHO'D CONVINCED HIMSELF THAT PASSERSBY MUTTERED, "THERE GOES A JEW," EACH TIME THEY SAW HIM. MY INSTINCT TOLD ME HE HAD IT WRONG.

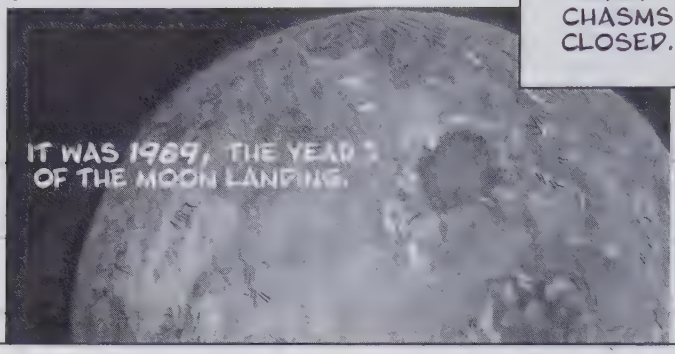
IT'S POSSIBLE THAT SOMETHING SIMILAR HAPPENED TO ME AS I WALKED AROUND MARION.



BUT THAT WASN'T NECESSARILY TOPMOST IN PEOPLE'S MINDS. IT'S MORE LIKELY THAT THEY DIDN'T SEE ME AT ALL.

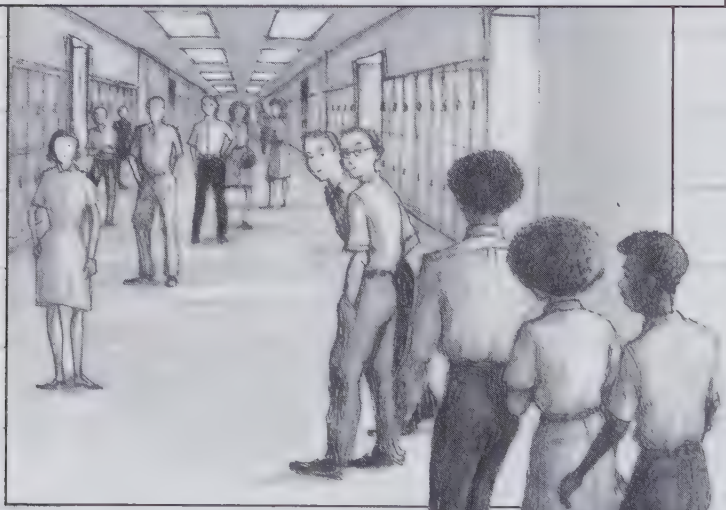


8TH GRADE:



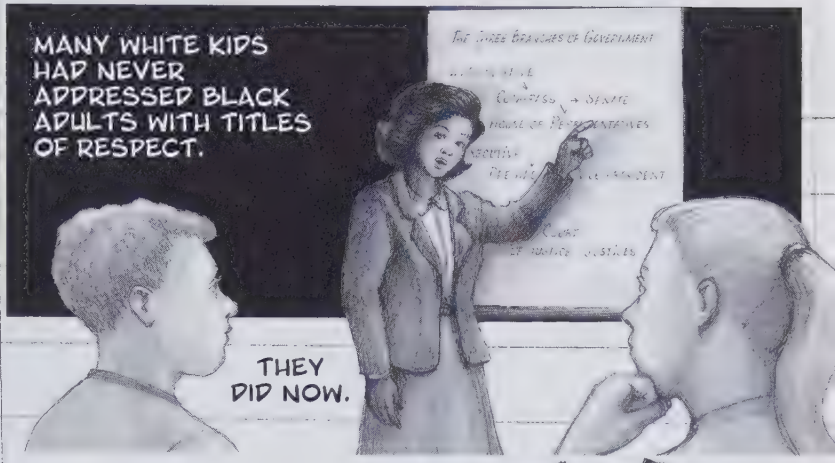
TWO GREAT CHASMS CLOSED.

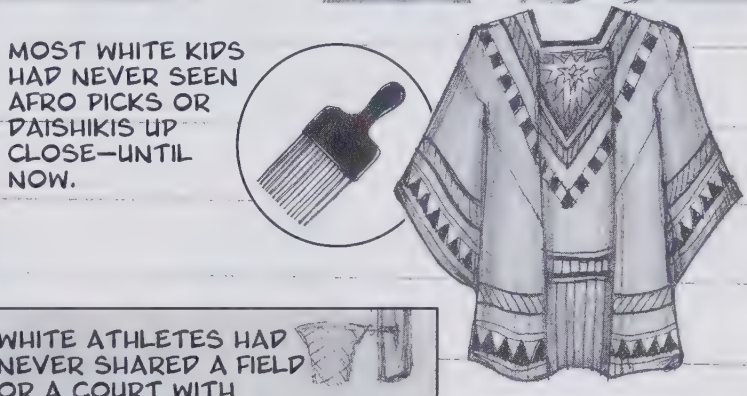
AND THE YEAR THAT PERRY COUNTY SCHOOLS SUCCUMBED TO COURT-ORDERED DESEGREGATION.

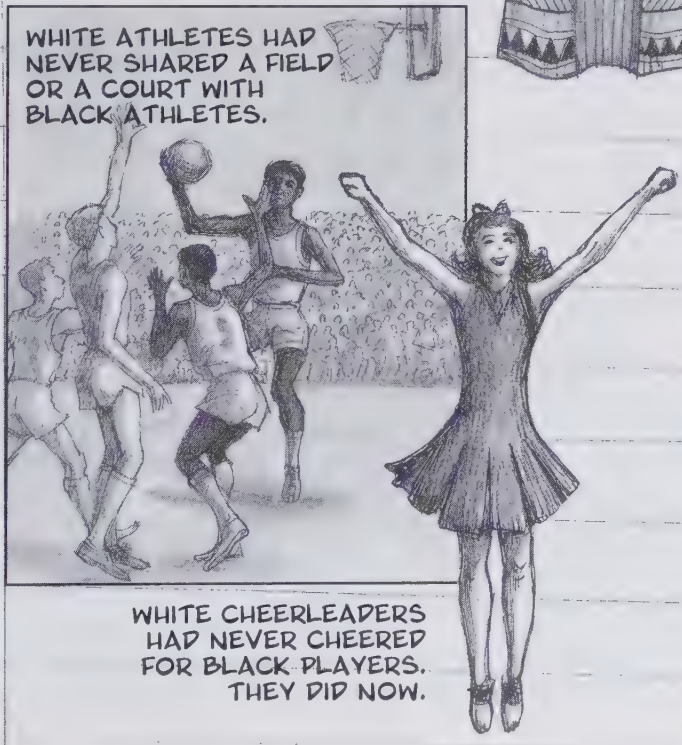


BLACK AND WHITE: WE HAD LIVED PARALLEL LIVES THAT NOW FINALLY INTERSECTED.

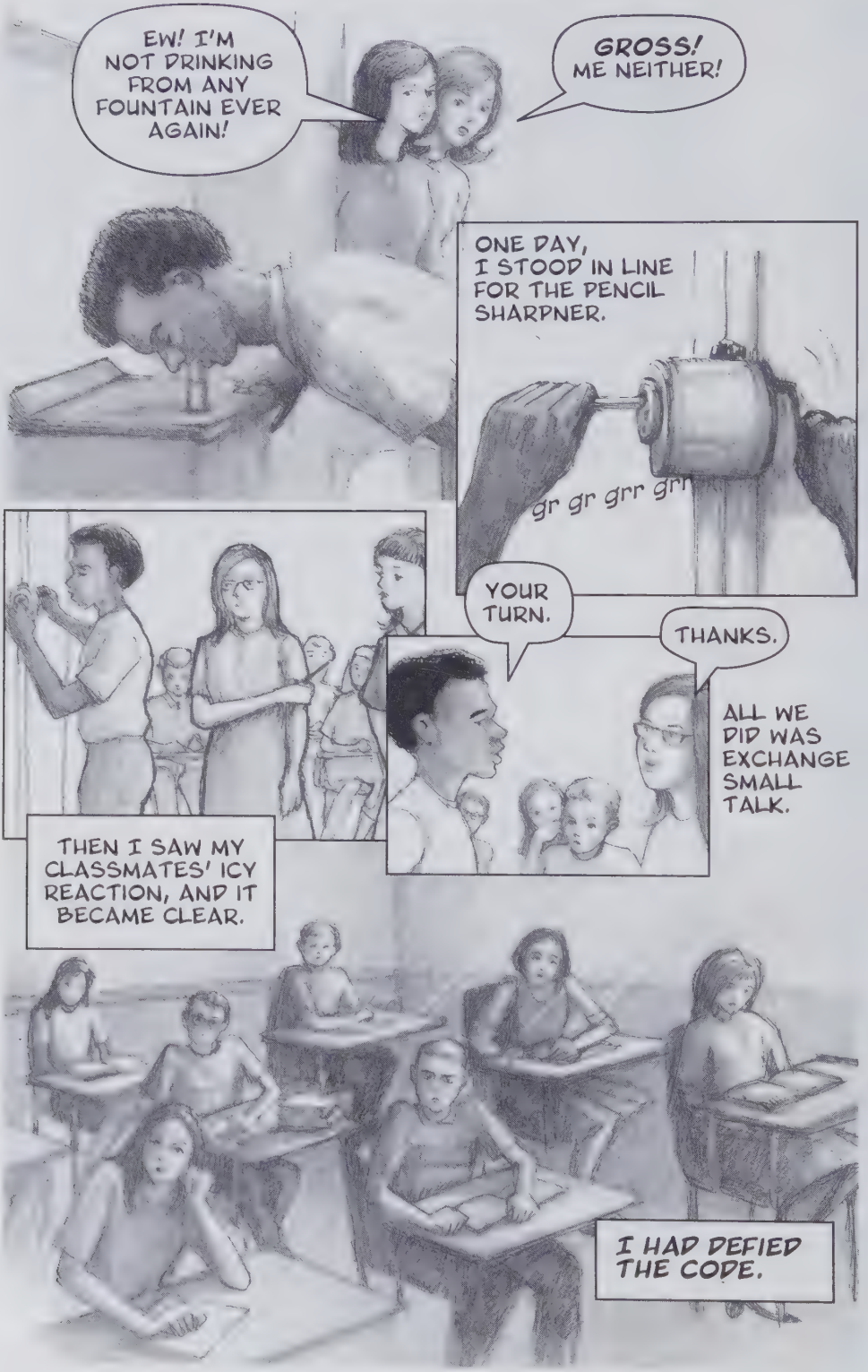
EACH DAY PRESENTED A NEW FIRST AT FRANCIS MARION HIGH SCHOOL.







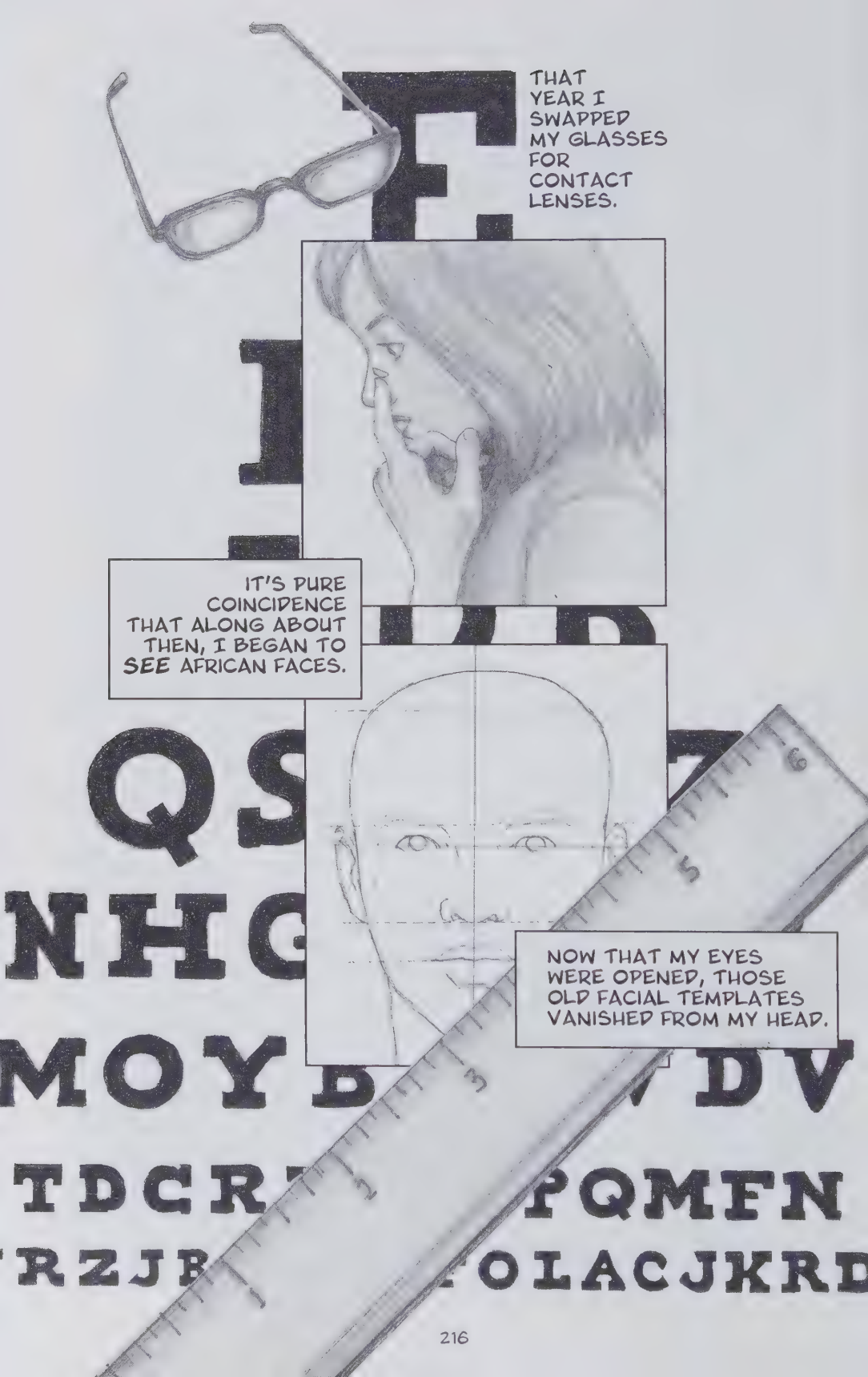
IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR INGRAINED BIASES TO EMERGE.



OUR NEW SCHOOLMATES FLAUNTED THE RULES LEFT AND RIGHT.

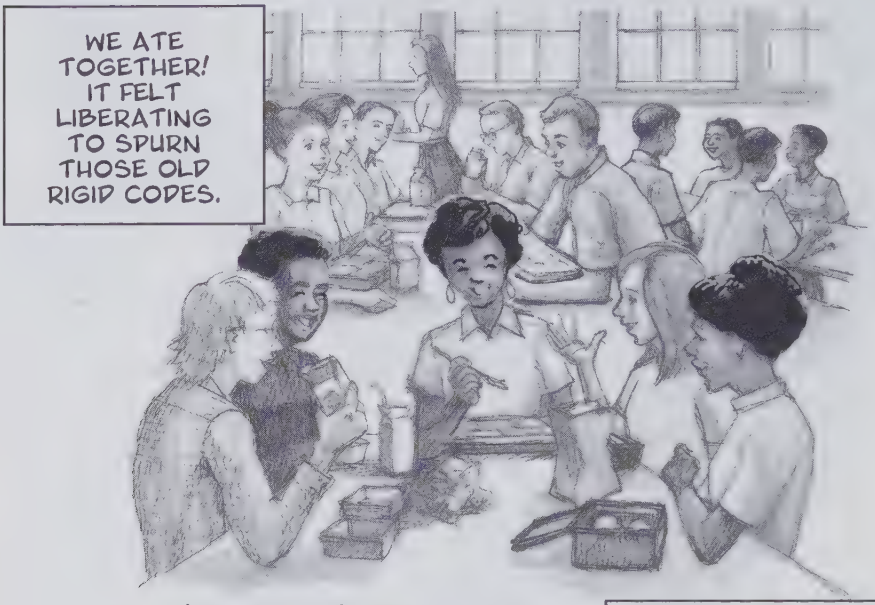
MY REGARD FOR THE RULES WAS GIVING WAY TO THE CURRENT SITUATION, NAMELY, A RAPPORT WITH MY BLACK CLASSMATES.

BUT THE SPARK OF CONNECTION LEAPT OVER THESE INITIAL GAPS.

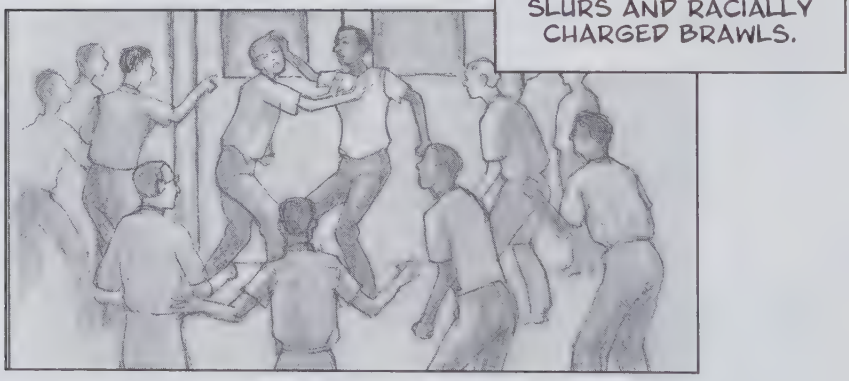

THAT YEAR I SWAPPED MY GLASSES FOR CONTACT LENSES.
IT'S PURE COINCIDENCE THAT ALONG ABOUT THEN, I BEGAN TO SEE AFRICAN FACES.
NOW THAT MY EYES WERE OPENED, THOSE OLD FACIAL TEMPLATES VANISHED FROM MY HEAD.

SEEING MADE ME DIZZY: ACROSS MY RETINAE, MILLIONS OF LIGHT RECEPTORS TOOK IN WHAT MY BLIND EYES HAD PREVIOUSLY MISSED.

GONE WERE THE DAYS WHEN I WAS DESPERATE TO BLEND IN. NOW I FORMED ALLIANCES WITH KIDS WHO EMBRACED RACIAL HARMONY.



THE VIOLENCE OF 1965 SEEMED LIKE SOMETHING FROM EONS PAST.



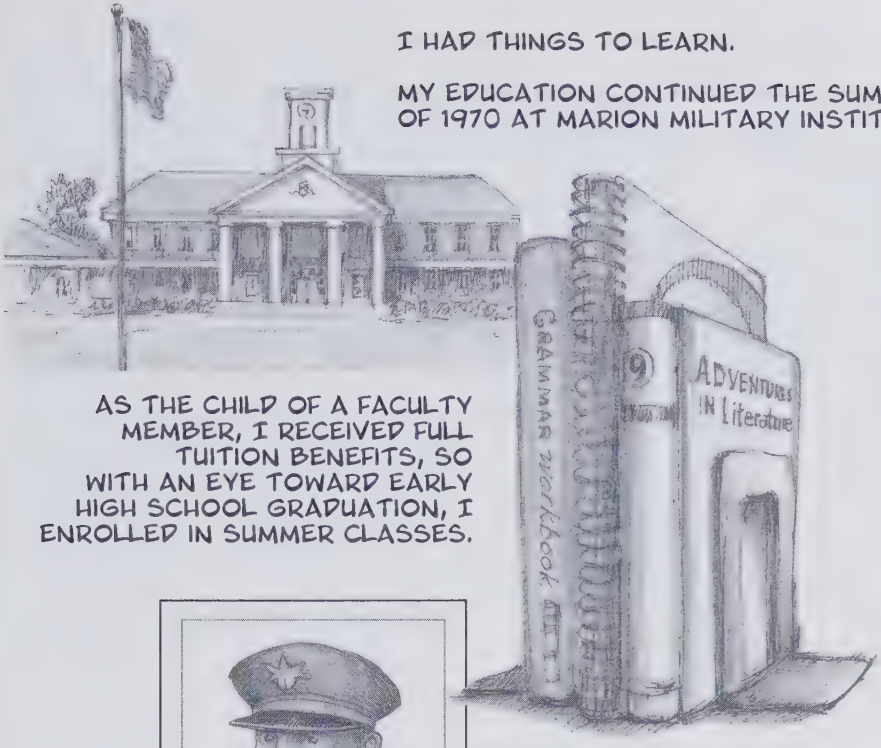
BEYOND THE VIOLENCE LAY MANY MORE EXPRESSIONS OF RACISM.

FRATERNIZING WITH BLACK KIDS GOT ME LOOKS OF CONTEMPT ON A DAILY BASIS. SOMETIMES THEY CAME FROM OLD FRIENDS, AND THAT HURT.

STILL, I FIGURED MY DEFIANCE WOULDN'T COST ME MUCH BESIDES REJECTION.

I HAD THINGS TO LEARN.

MY EDUCATION CONTINUED THE SUMMER OF 1970 AT MARION MILITARY INSTITUTE.



AS THE CHILD OF A FACULTY MEMBER, I RECEIVED FULL TUITION BENEFITS, SO WITH AN EYE TOWARD EARLY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION, I ENROLLED IN SUMMER CLASSES.

MI, AS THE SCHOOL WAS COMMONLY KNOWN, HAD JUST ACCEPTED ITS FIRST BLACK CADET.

I DIDN'T HESITATE TO BEFRIEND HIM.

AS USUAL, MY PARENTS HAD NO INKLING WHAT I WAS UP TO.

ALL WE EVER DID WAS WALK AROUND CAMPUS BETWEEN CLASSES.

ON OUR STROLLS, WE NEVER NOTICED RAISED EYEBROWS OR SIDE-LONG GLANCES. I GUESS WE NEVER LOOKED AROUND THAT MUCH.

THE COMMANDANT GOT THE NEWS AND, SOON, SO DID THE TOWN.

THIS IS HOW I IMAGINE THE GRAPEVINE IN OPERATION:

THEY WERE STANDING AWFUL CLOSE. I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES.

ARE THEY GONNA BE EXPELLED OR WHAT?

I JUST GOT OFF THE PHONE WITH JANET. SHE SAW 'EM KISSING!

GROSS!

ONLY REASON I'M PASSING THIS ALONG IS SO YOU CAN BE PRAYING.

BECAUSE SHE MIGHT BE P-R-E-G?

PSST. IT'S A *JUICY* ONE. HOLD YOUR HORSES 'TIL I GET OFF THE PHONE.

OH, MA GAWD! HURRY UP!

SHE'S RUINED HER LIFE. HOW TRAGIC. I FEEL SO BAD FOR HER POOR PARENTS.

OH, NO! LET ME CALL THEM RIGHT AWAY BEFORE IT'S ALL OVER TOWN!

NESTOR, I HATE TO BE THE BEARER OF BAD NEWS, BUT AS YOUR FRIEND...
I WAS ON MY WAY HOME FROM CLASS.
boom
WE WERE EACH BESIDE OURSELVES, BUT NOT FOR THE SAME REASON.
LIES! LIES!
YOU PUT MY JOB IN JEOPARDY!
THE ROAR OF OUR INDIVIDUAL FEARS KEPT US FROM HEARING EACH OTHER.

WITHIN A FEW DAYS, I RECEIVED A DISCIPLINARY LETTER FROM THE COMMANDANT.

Dear Lila,

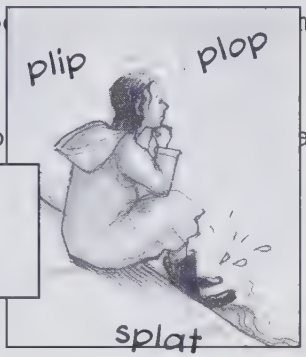
Uxccolv iw ssqo dopr rte
biygl fwasqd fvcde.
Tplm cj iero

I RECALL ONLY ONE PHRASE.

Opj boaul cvnle emrpae mqwqpje.
Sppro bnbi tgaiwetb einf gere. **We expect that you will restrict yourself to bona fide academic activities.** Ommne len web ho-
mom emre wfcewecwt blckcde.

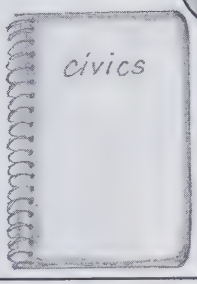
Please call my office as soon as po an
appointme

DADDY DID NOT LOSE HIS JOB, BUT HE PROBABLY LOST CONFIDENCE IN MY GOOD SENSE.



IN THE FALL, I WENT BACK TO FMHS, WHERE LIFE RETURNED TO NORMAL.

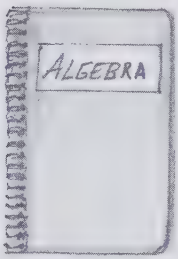
UP TO A POINT.



GOING TO SUMMER SCHOOL HAD THROWN MY SCHEDULE OFF COURSE.

I HAD ONE FOOT IN THE 10TH GRADE, ANOTHER, IN THE 9TH.

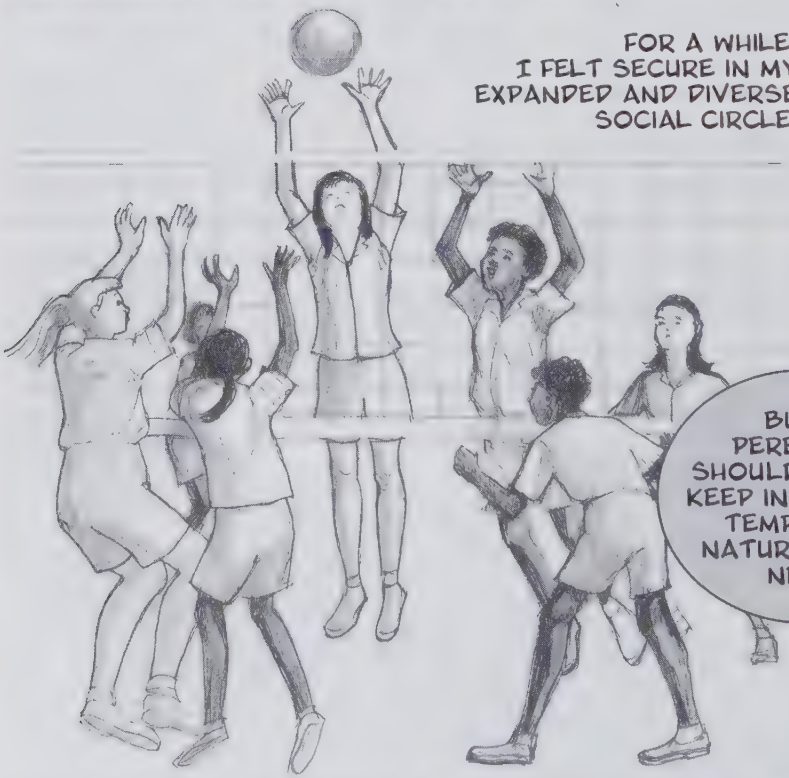
AND I WAS NO LONGER IN THE CLASS OF '74.



OLD FRIENDSHIPS ERODED FURTHER.

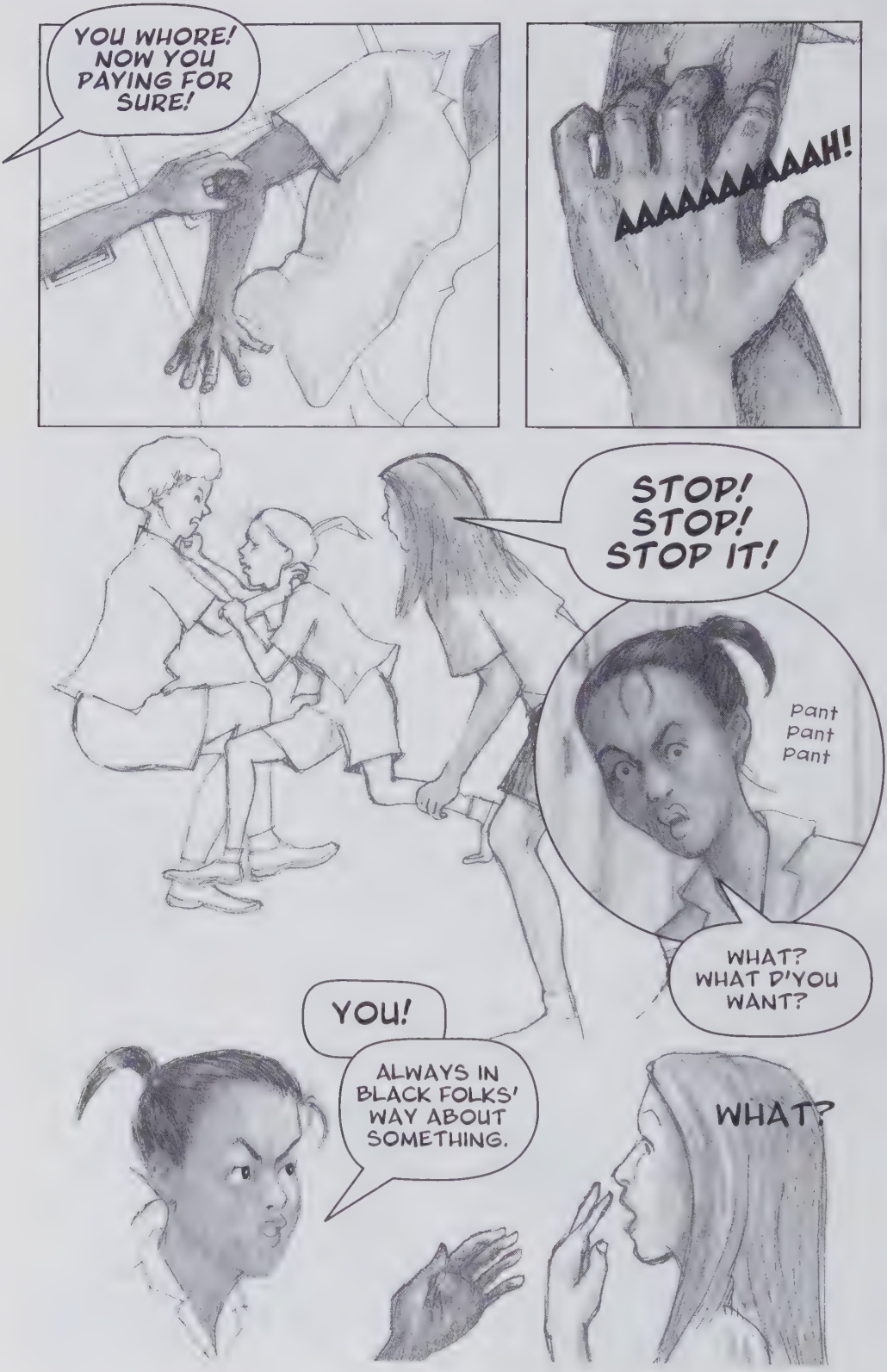
OUR WORLDS INTERSECTED IN SURPRISING WAYS.

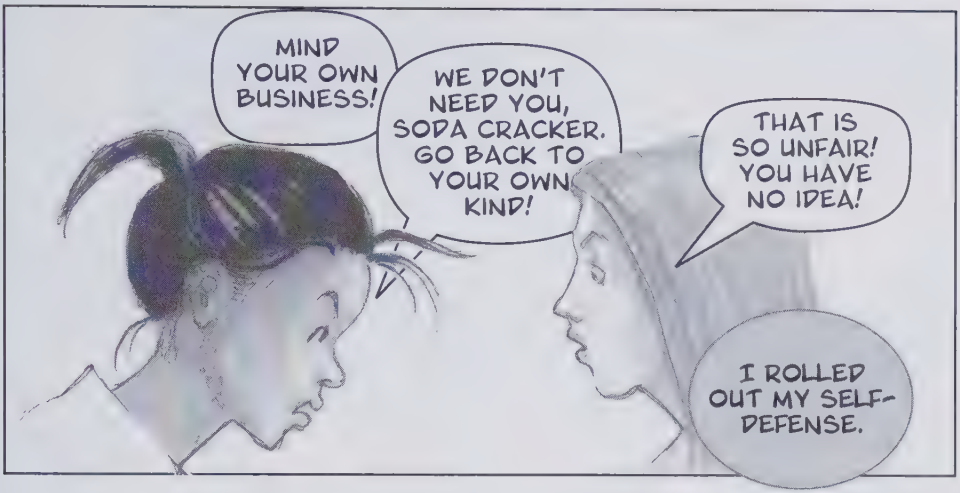
FOR A WHILE, I FELT SECURE IN MY EXPANDED AND DIVERSE SOCIAL CIRCLE.



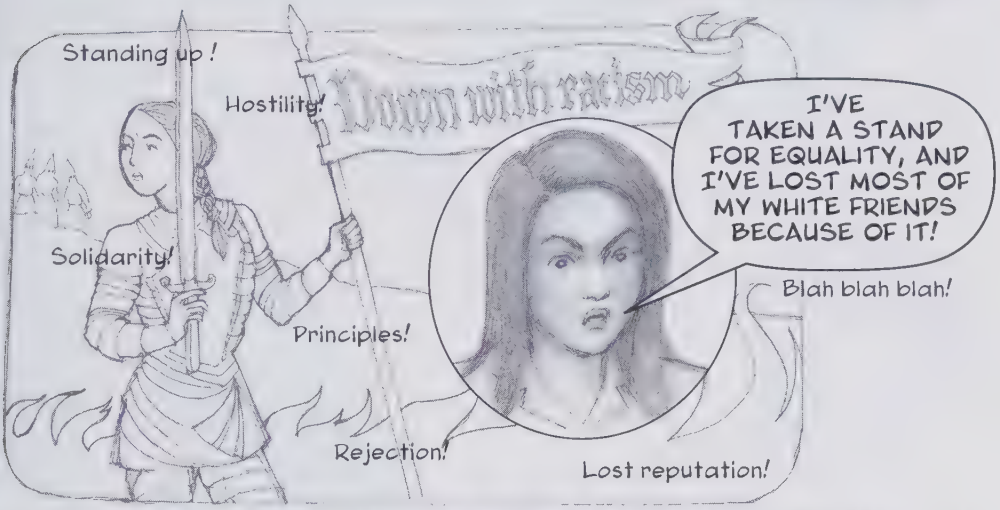
THE MIGRATORY LIFE BRINGS SWEEPING VISTAS, BUT IT'S HARD TO NAIL DOWN WHERE HOME IS OR FIND A PEOPLE YOU CAN CALL YOUR OWN.

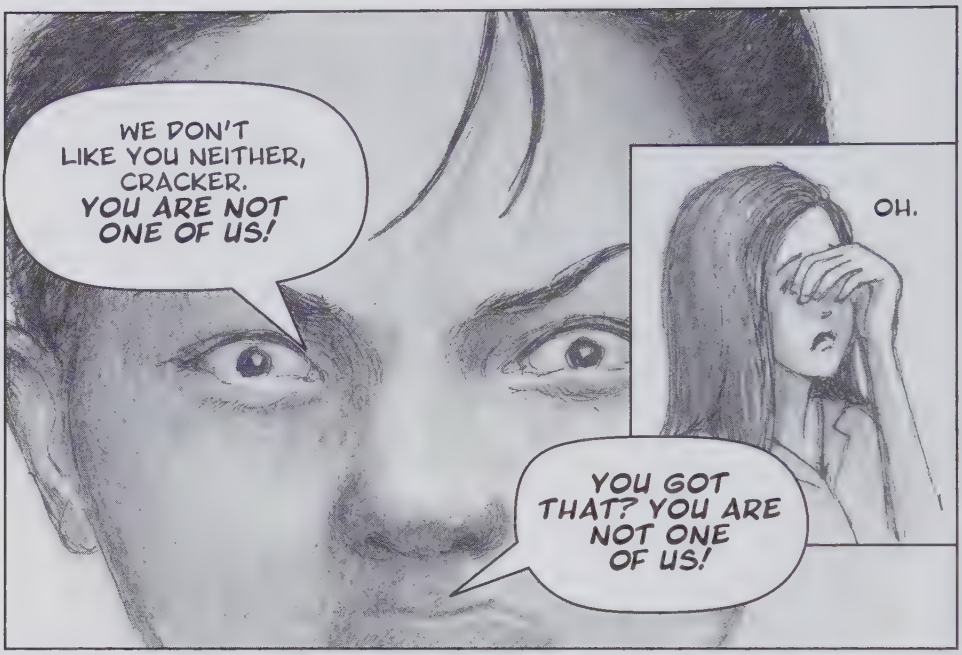
ONE DAY AFTER GYM CLASS, MY UTOPIAN DREAMS SUFFERED A BLOW.
YOU BETTER STOP LYING ABOUT ME.
MAKE ME!
CAUSE YOU WRONG. I AIN'T TOLD NO LIES.
YOU NOTHING BUT A WHORE, AND THAT'S A FACT.
TAKE THAT BACK, YOU BITCH!
I'M GONNA YANK YOUR HAIR OUT IF YOU DON'T.
OH, MY GOD!
WOW!


YOU WHORE! NOW YOU PAYING FOR SURE!
AAAAAAAAAAH!
STOP! STOP! STOP IT!
Pant Pant Pant
WHAT? WHAT D'YOU WANT?
YOU!
ALWAYS IN BLACK FOLKS' WAY ABOUT SOMETHING.
WHAT?

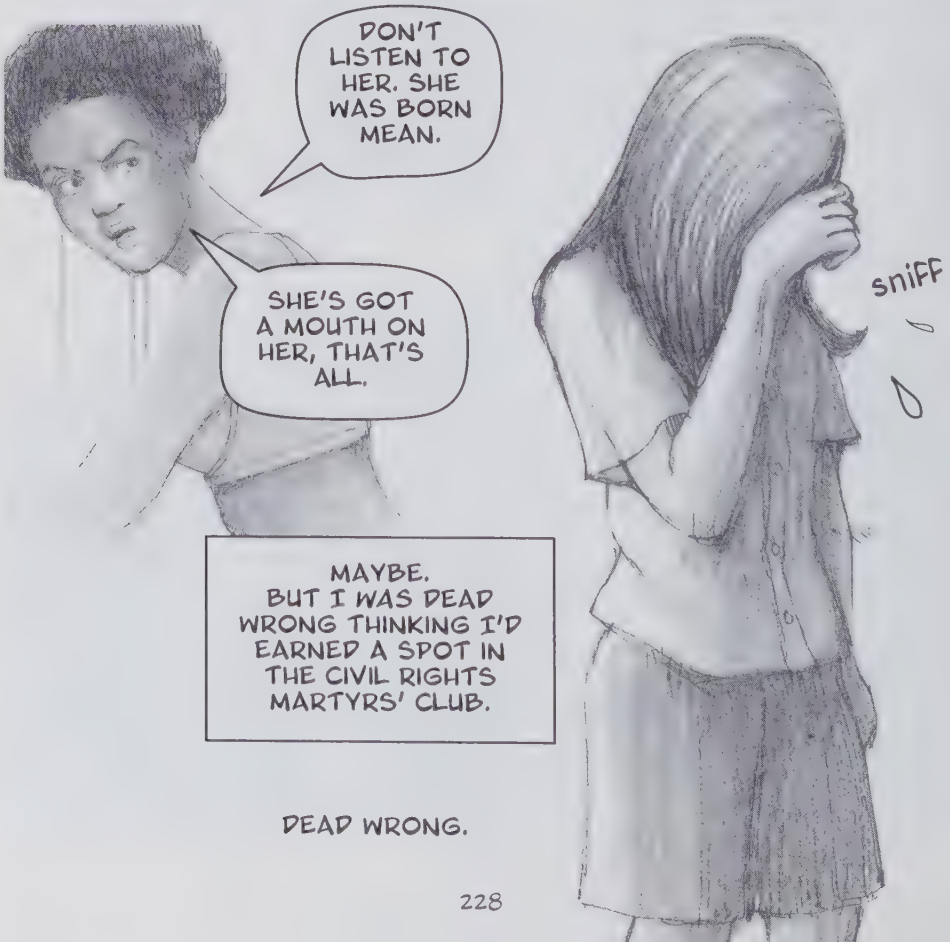


IT GOT RATHER IMPASSIONED.



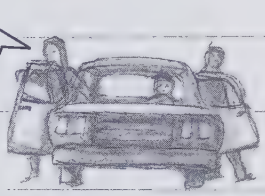


I DON'T KNOW WHEN IT HAPPENED, BUT THE LOCKER ROOM HAD EMPTIED OUT. ONLY TWO OF US REMAINED.



1971

A NEW SCHOOL YEAR MEANT NEW SCHOOL SUPPLIES: SHARP PENCIL POINTS, CLEAN PAPER, FRESH PAGES. I LOVED ALL THAT.

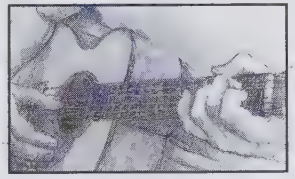


MY BROTHER BEGAN HIS STINT AT FMHS THAT YEAR. I WAS A JUNIOR.

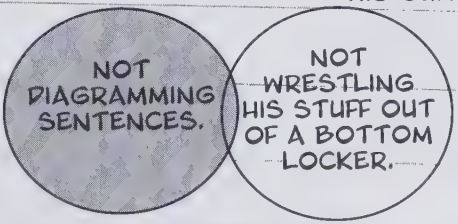
OUR WALK NOW WAS ONLY AS LONG AS THE PATH FROM THE CAR TO THE SCHOOL'S FRONT DOOR.

I WOULD LIKE TO REPORT FMHS AS A WONDERFUL FRESH START FOR JOHNNY, BUT RIGHT AWAY HE HAD DETRACTORS.

HE WASN'T TOO KEEN ON SCHOOL TO BEGIN WITH.

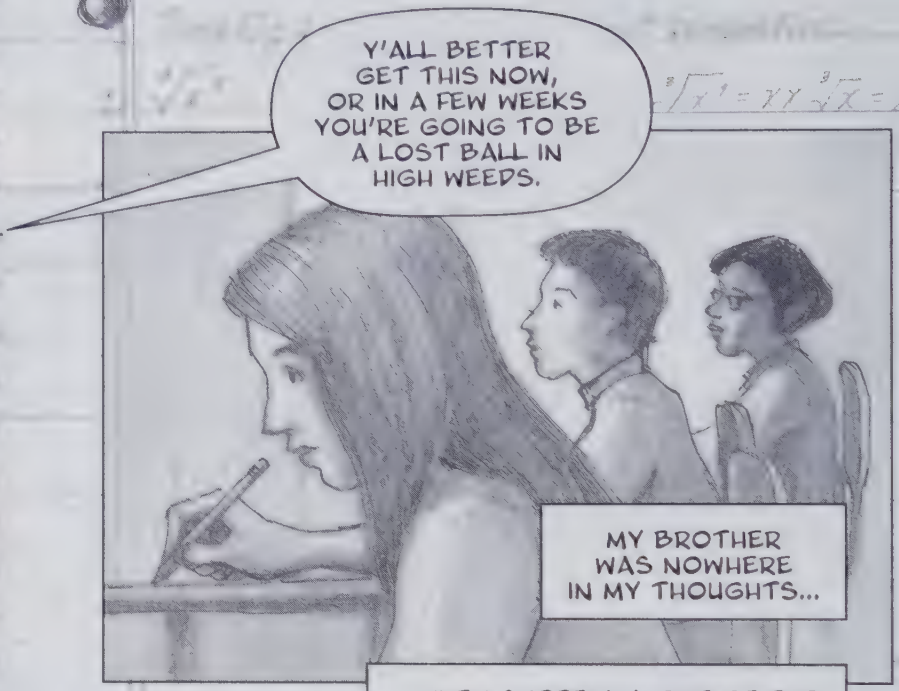


HE WOULD RATHER HAVE BEEN POPPING WHEELIES SOMEWHERE OR LEARNING NEW CHORDS ON HIS GUITAR.

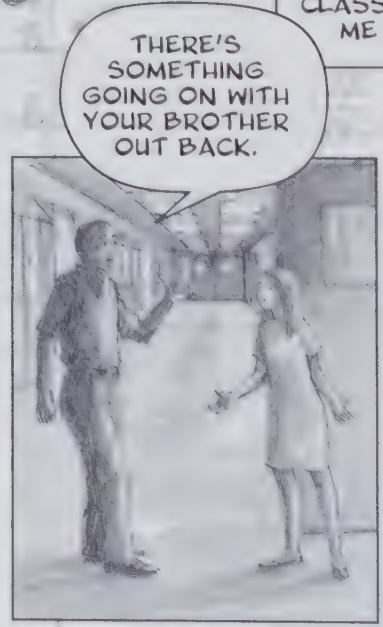


OR DEFENDING HIS SISTER'S HONOR.

IT HAPPENED DURING ALGEBRA ONE AFTERNOON.



...WHEN SUDDENLY, ONE OF THE COACHES APPEARED AT THE CLASSROOM DOOR AND CALLED ME OUT TO THE HALLWAY.



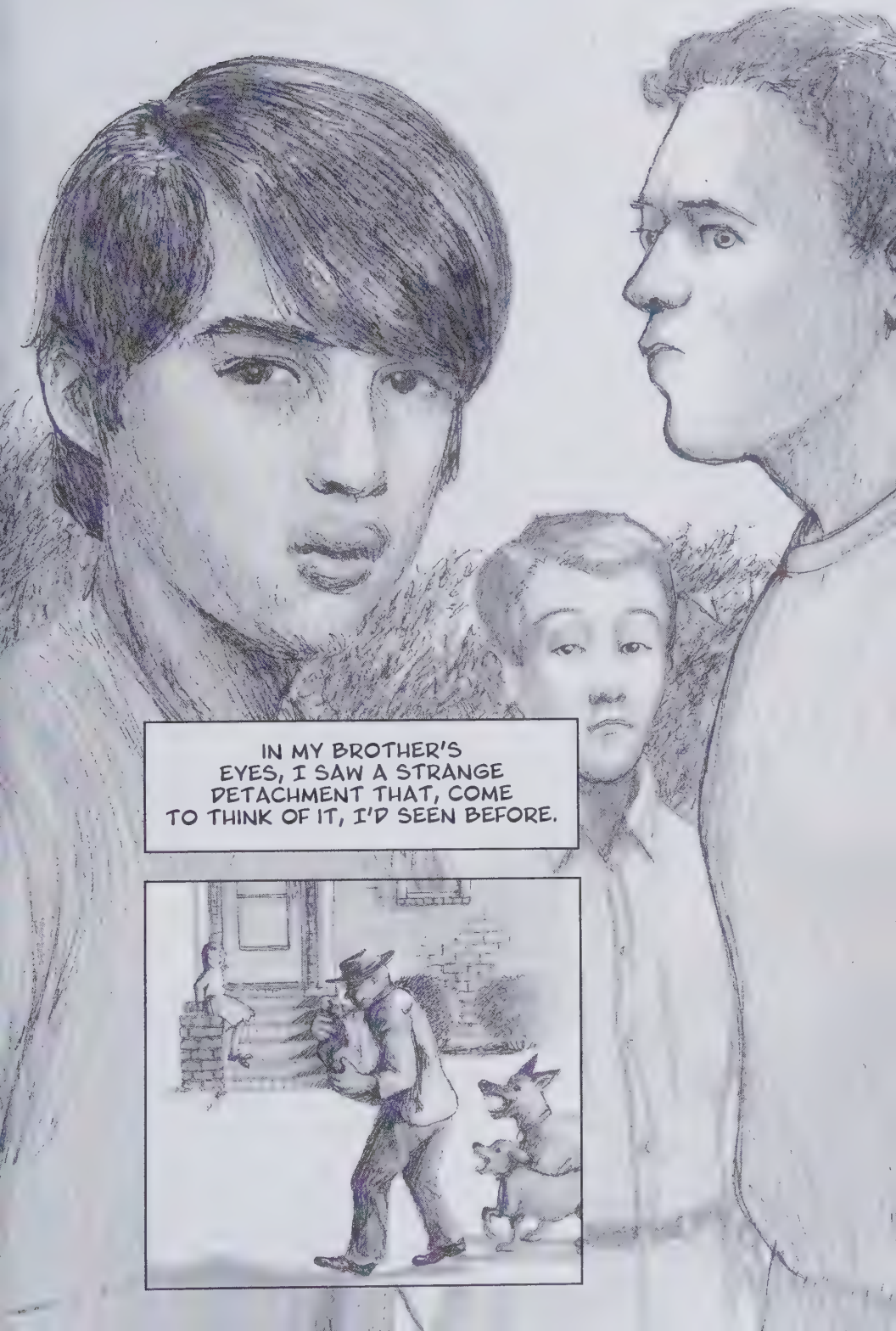
A GROUP OF BOYS STOOD IN THE BAKING SUN. MY BROTHER WAS ONE OF THEM.

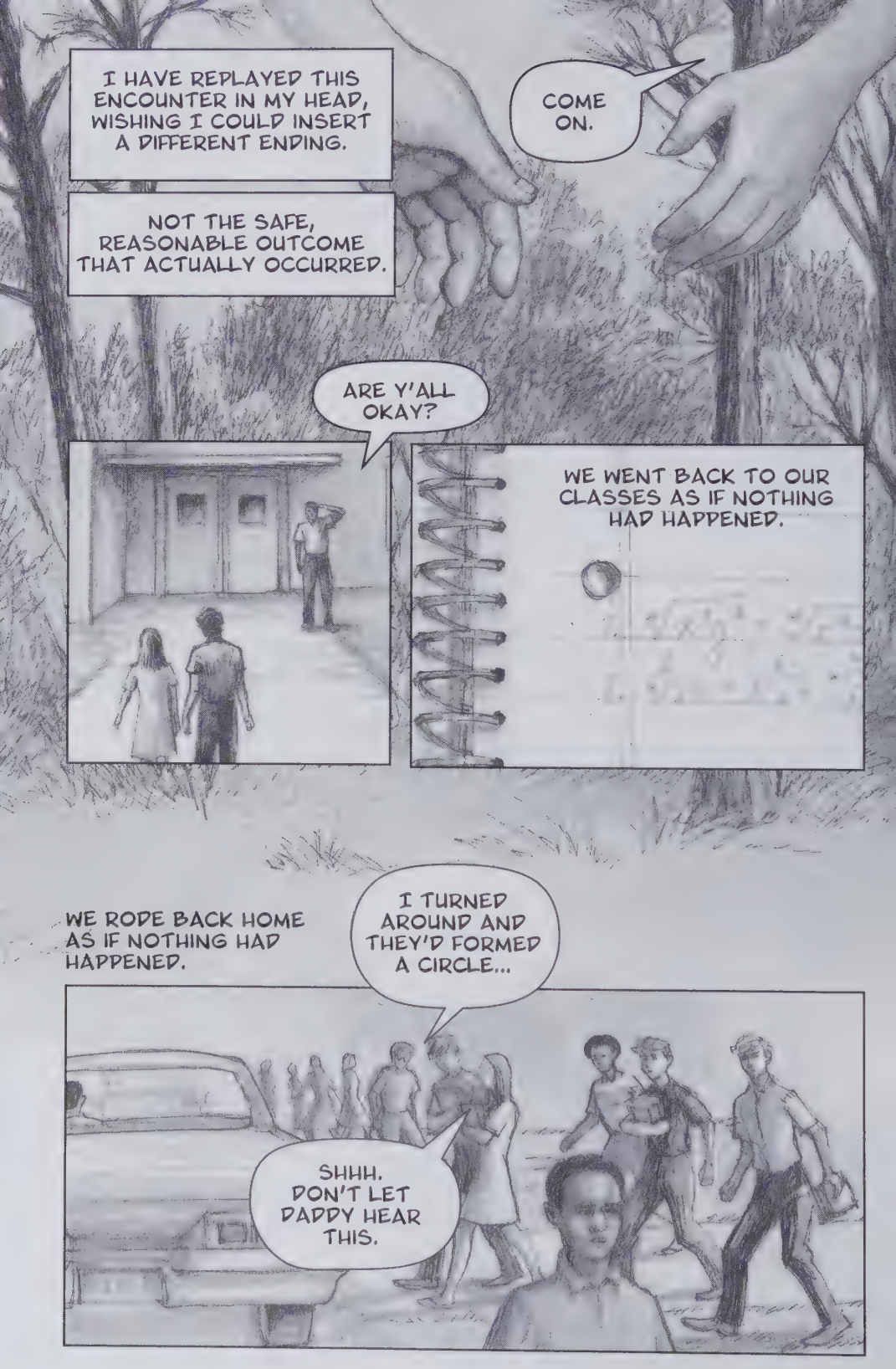
ALONE, I WALKED ACROSS A STRETCH OF HOT ASPHALT.

I SAW THAT JOHNNY WAS SURROUNDED.

NOBODY SAID A WORD AS I GOT NEAR.
THEY KNEW ME; I KNEW THEM. BUT EVERY BOY REGARDED ME WITH A CHILLING GLARE.

I HAD NO IDEA WHAT HAD LED TO THIS STANDOFF.

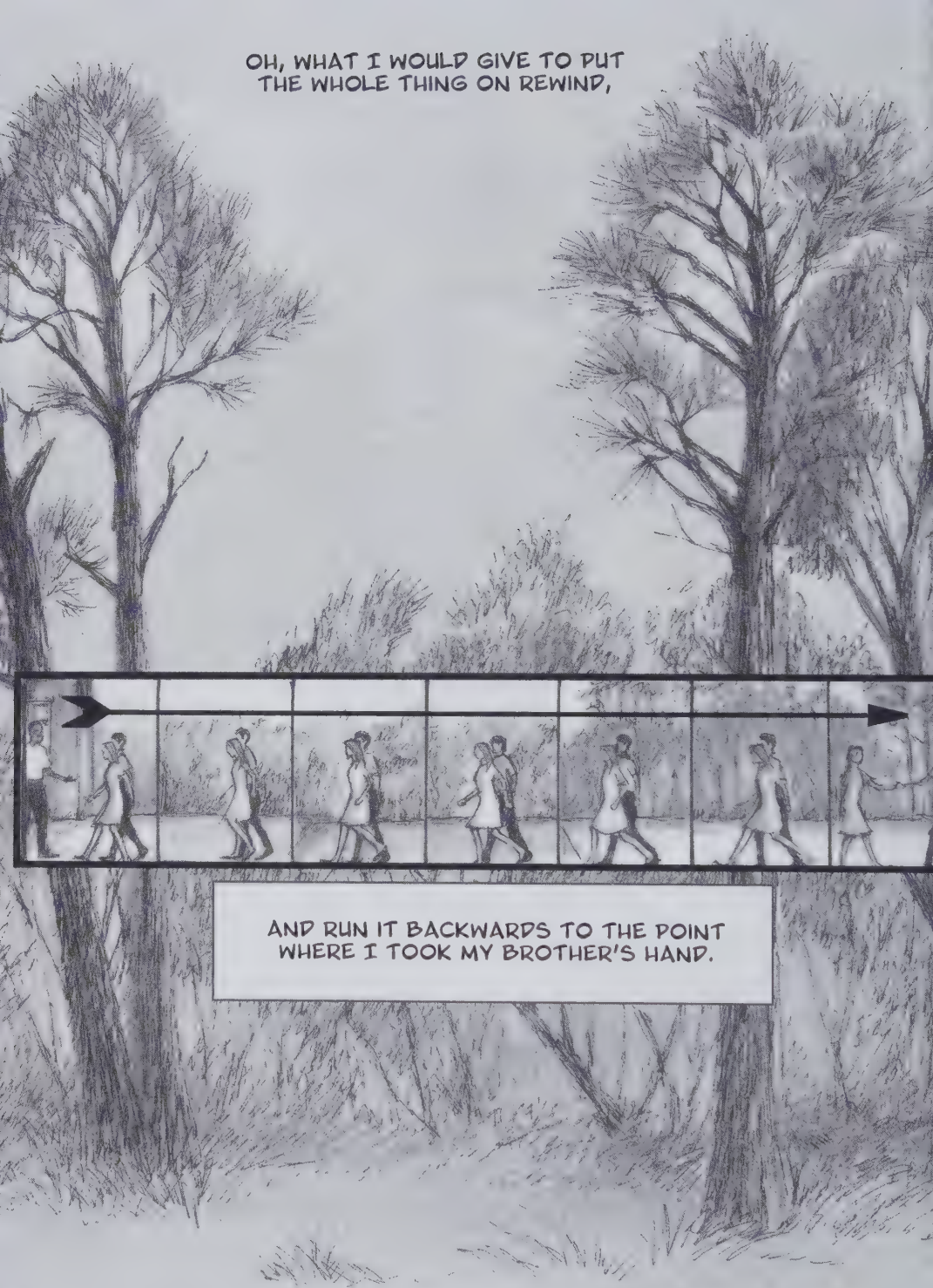



I HAVE REPLAYED THIS ENCOUNTER IN MY HEAD, WISHING I COULD INSERT A DIFFERENT ENDING.
COME ON.
NOT THE SAFE, REASONABLE OUTCOME THAT ACTUALLY OCCURRED.
ARE Y'ALL OKAY?
WE WENT BACK TO OUR CLASSES AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.
WE RODE BACK HOME AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.
I TURNED AROUND AND THEY'D FORMED A CIRCLE...
SHHH. DON'T LET DADDY HEAR THIS.

EVENTUALLY, JOHNNY TOLD ME THE REST OF THE STORY, BUT I CAN'T SEEM TO PLACE THAT CONVERSATION.

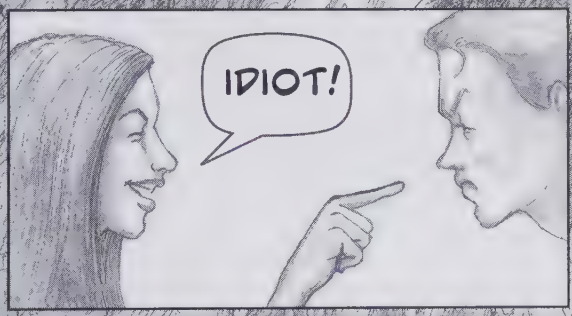
WAS IT SOMEWHERE AROUND THE HOUSE, OUT OF EARSHOT, SWALLOWED UP BY THE SOUNDS OF NORMALCY?

NOW HE TELLS ME.


OH, WHAT I WOULD GIVE TO PUT THE WHOLE THING ON REWIND,
AND RUN IT BACKWARDS TO THE POINT WHERE I TOOK MY BROTHER'S HAND.

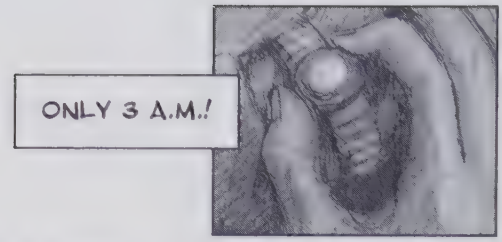
EXCEPT THIS TIME, I'D LOOK THE RINGLEADER IN HIS HATE-FILLED EYES AND DEMAND HE *SAY IT TO MY FACE.*

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

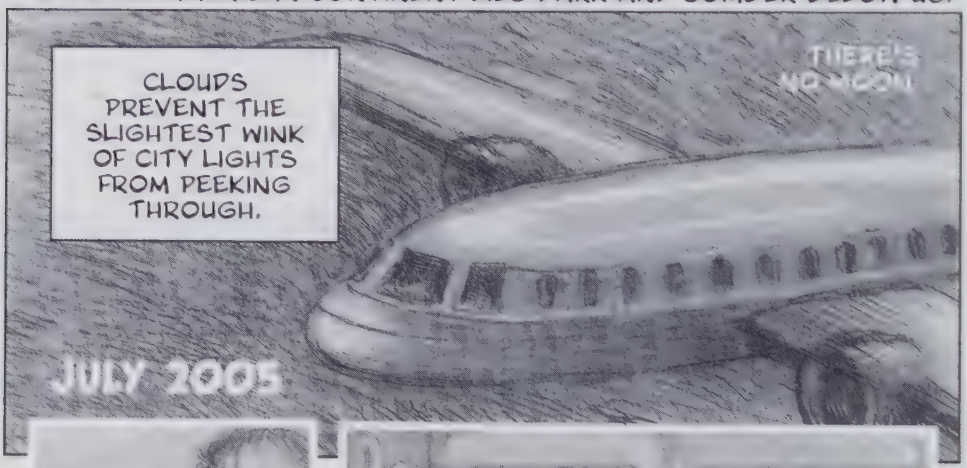


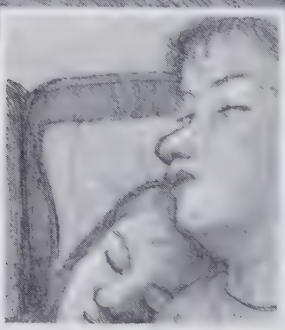
Epilogue

LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY

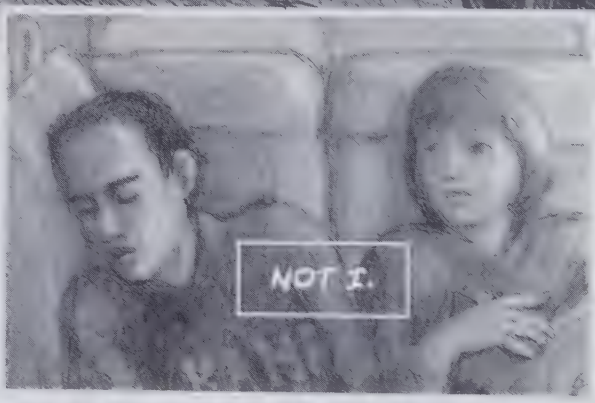


THE SOUTH AMERICAN CONTINENT LIES DARK AND SOMBER BELOW US.





MOST OF THE PASSENGERS SLEEP.

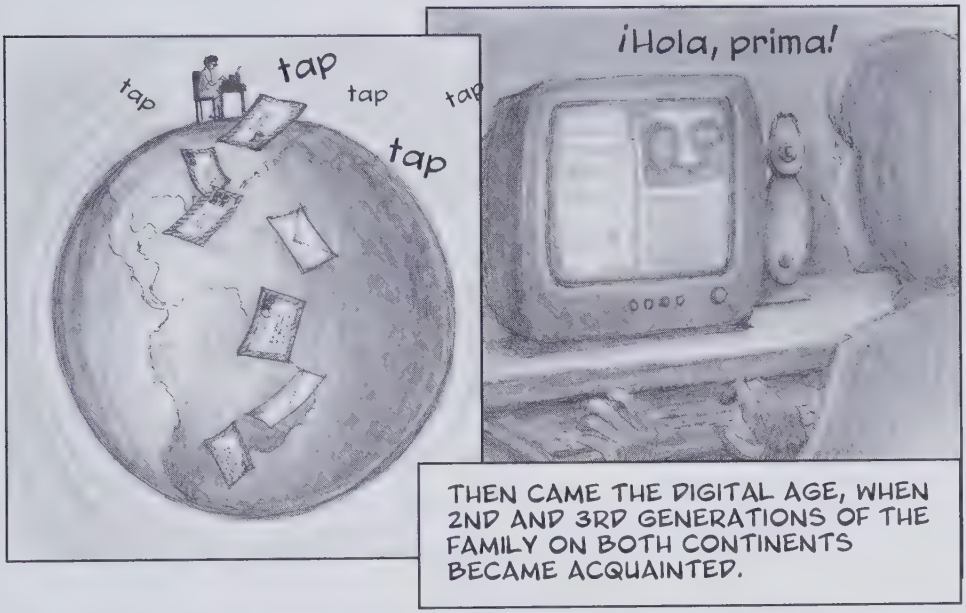


IT'S MY FIRST TRIP BACK TO ARGENTINA SINCE WE IMMIGRATED. BEN, MY 21-YEAR-OLD SON, IS MY TRAVELING COMPANION.

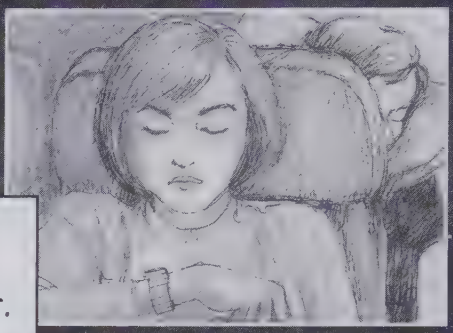
DALLAS, TX, TO BUENOS AIRES: 11 HOURS

REPEATED GLANCES AT THE ROUTE MONITOR CONVINCE ME THAT WE'RE ONLY CRAWLING.

FOR SO LONG, IT WAS HER ENDLESS STREAM OF CORRESPONDENCE THAT KEPT FAMILY TIES FROM DYING OUT.

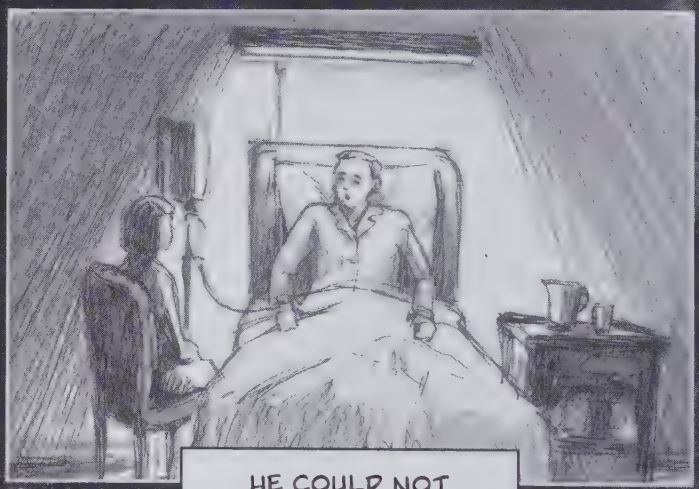


THE ARC OF MY LIFE OWES ITS PRIMARY SHAPE TO A LONG-AGO DECISION TO IMMIGRATE NORTH. I THINK ABOUT THAT ON THIS SLEEPLESS FLIGHT.



THEN MY MIND JUMPS TO ANOTHER WAKEFUL NIGHT.

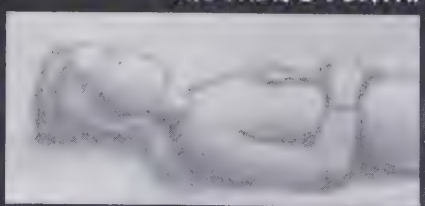
IN 1992, WHEN DADDY HAD SURGERY, I STAYED OVERNIGHT WITH HIM IN THE HOSPITAL ROOM.



HE COULD NOT STOP TALKING.

HE COULD NOT STOP RECOUNTING THE HORRORS OF HIS BOYHOOD.

HE SUFFERED ANEW HIS MOTHER'S DEATH.



HE RELIVED THE MOMENT WHEN HIS STEP-GRANDMOTHER TURNED HIM AND HIS BROTHER OUT. AFTER THAT, THEY SLEPT IN A HAYSTACK AND DUG FOR SCRAPS IN HOTEL CARBAGE BINS.

OF COURSE, I'D HEARD THESE STORIES BEFORE.

HE'D TOLD THEM AT CHURCHES, MOSTLY AROUND THE ALABAMA BLACK BELT.

I WENT ALONG ON A FEW OF THESE ENGAGEMENTS, BUT WITHOUT FULLY ENJOYING MYSELF.

ONCE, ON OUR WAY HOME FROM ONE OF THOSE SERVICES, DADDY LET ME SIT ON HIS LAP AND BRIEFLY DRIVE THE COUNTRY ROAD.

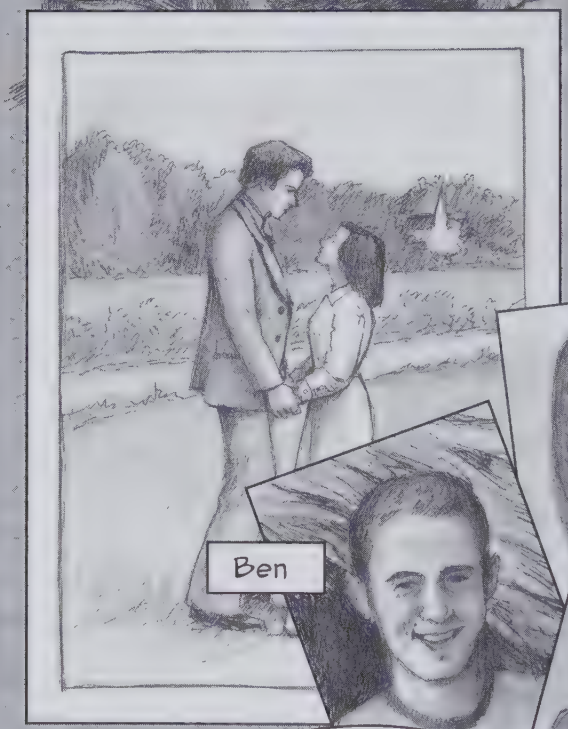
THE HEADLIGHT BEAMS PASSED THROUGH A FLURRY OF MOTHS.

I FELT PEACEFUL.

MY FATHER HAD RETURNED TO HIS CUSTOMARY SELF, NOT THE VULNERABLE PERSON HE SEEMED TO BE BEHIND THE LECTERN.

HIS JOURNEY FROM PRIVATION TO OPPORTUNITY WAS LIKE THAT OF IMMIGRANTS THE WORLD OVER. I DIDN'T KNOW THAT YET.

I HAVE A SETTLED LIFE. I AM A BENEFICIARY OF MY IMMIGRANT ANCESTORS' COLLECTIVE COURAGE.

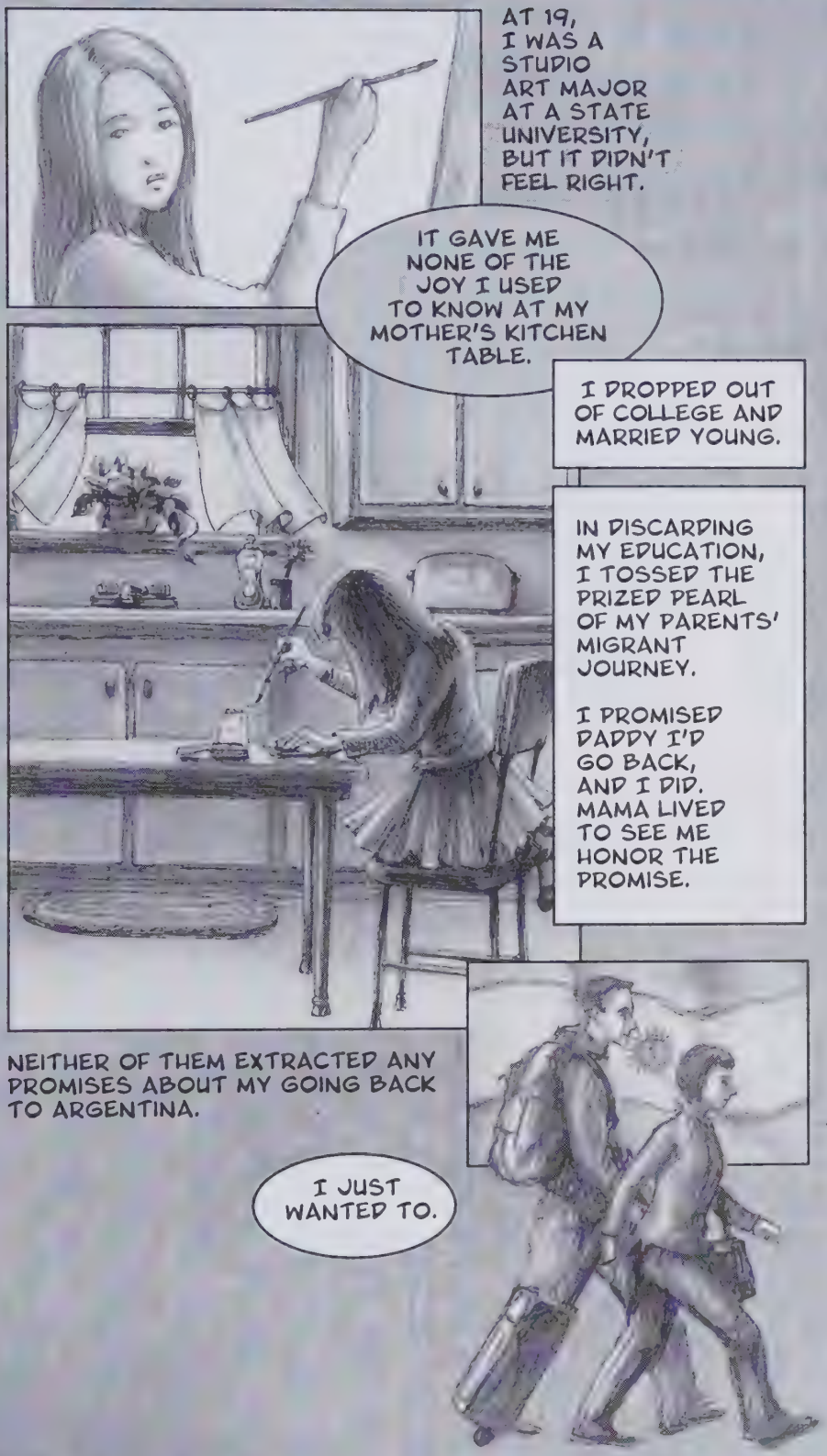


AT 18, I BECAME A NATURALIZED AMERICAN CITIZEN, AND IN 1976, I MARRIED.

WE HAVE THREE CHILDREN.

SUPPOSE MY FAMILY HAD NEVER LEFT ARGENTINA. THESE THREE HUMAN BEINGS WOULDN'T EXIST!

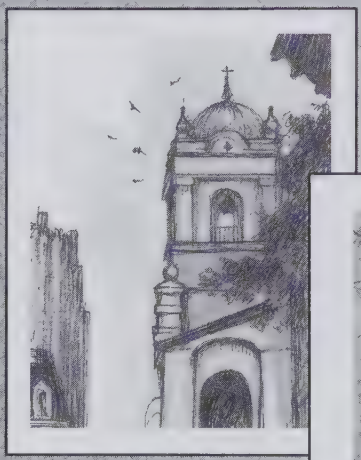
BEYOND THAT, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SPECULATE JUST HOW THE FAMILY'S IMMIGRATION CHANGED THE ARC OF MY LIFE.


AT 19, I WAS A STUDIO ART MAJOR AT A STATE UNIVERSITY, BUT IT DIDN'T FEEL RIGHT.
IT GAVE ME NONE OF THE JOY I USED TO KNOW AT MY MOTHER'S KITCHEN TABLE.
I DROPPED OUT OF COLLEGE AND MARRIED YOUNG.
IN DISCARDING MY EDUCATION, I TOSSED THE PRIZED PEARL OF MY PARENTS' MIGRANT JOURNEY.
I PROMISED DADDY I'D GO BACK, AND I DID. MAMA LIVED TO SEE ME HONOR THE PROMISE.
NEITHER OF THEM EXTRACTED ANY PROMISES ABOUT MY GOING BACK TO ARGENTINA.
I JUST WANTED TO.

IT'S BEEN **44** YEARS.

MAMA PAINTED BUENOS AIRES IN LOVELY TONES. I WANT TO SEE IT FOR MYSELF.

EVERY IMAGE I HAVE OF ARGENTINA IS FADED, BORROWED, INHERITED, OUTDATED, OR IMAGINED.



AND INDEED, THIS HAPPENS.

I WILL ALSO SEE THE ARGENTINA THAT DADDY EXPERIENCED.

HE WILL COME TO MIND WHEN I SPOT *TRIGUEÑOS* TOILING AT SOCIETY'S THANKLESS JOBS.

AMONG THESE ARE *CARTONEROS*, WHO ROAM THE STREETS COLLECTING DISCARDS TO RECYCLE.

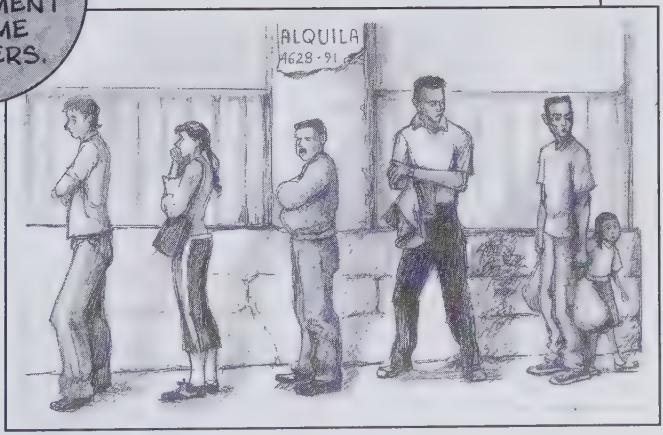
I'LL CATCH REFLECTIONS OF HIS INCAN FORBEARS IN BUENOS AIRES'S GROWING IMMIGRANT POPULATION.

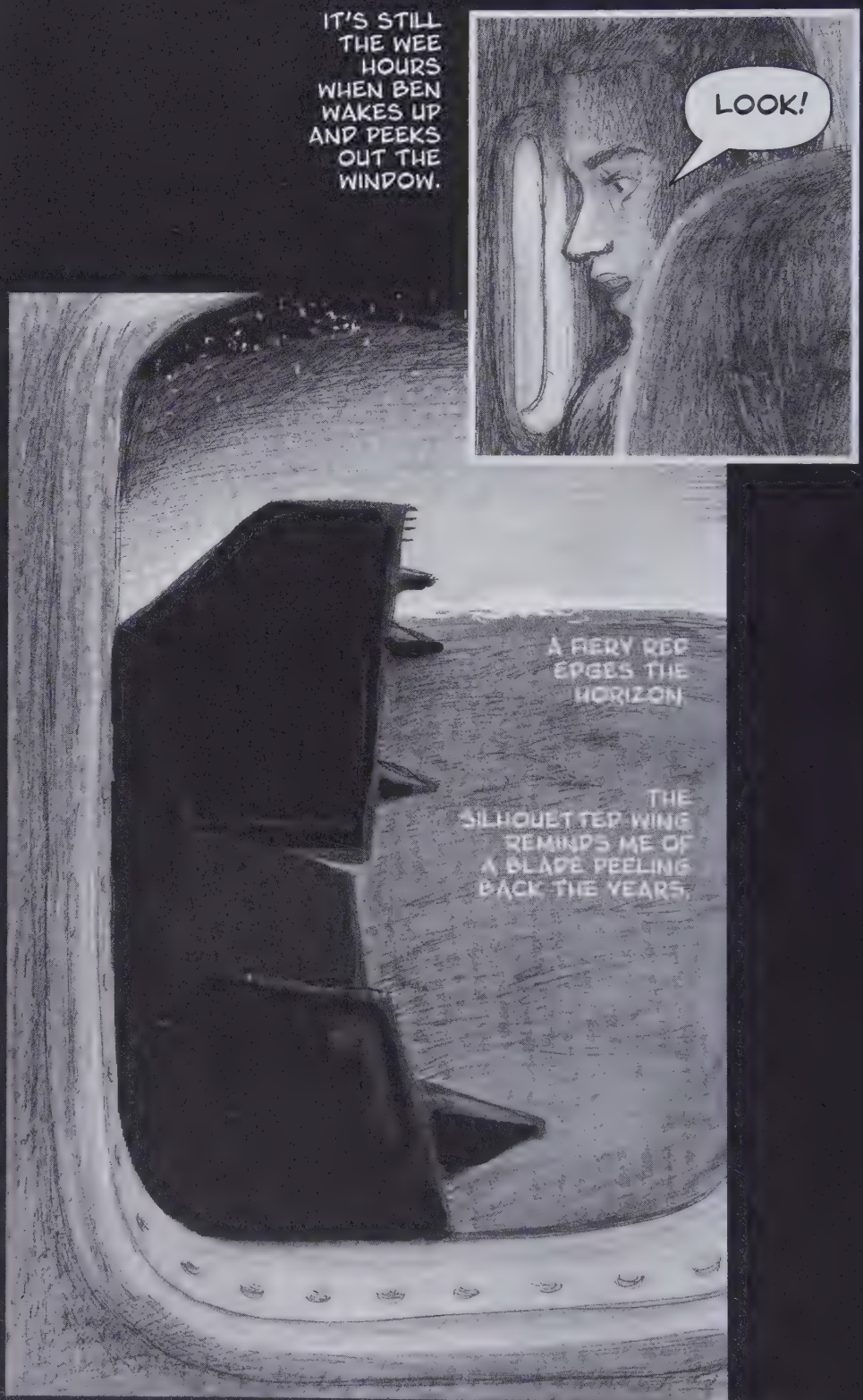
THEY ARE MOSTLY BOLIVIANS AND PARAGUAYANS.

IN MY PARENTS' LONG ABSENCE, THE DEMOGRAPHICS HAVE SHIFTED. THE NEWEST ARRIVALS, WITH THEIR BRONZE COMPLEXIONS, OCCUPY THE LOWEST STATIONS ONCE HELD CHIEFLY BY *TRIGUEÑOS*.

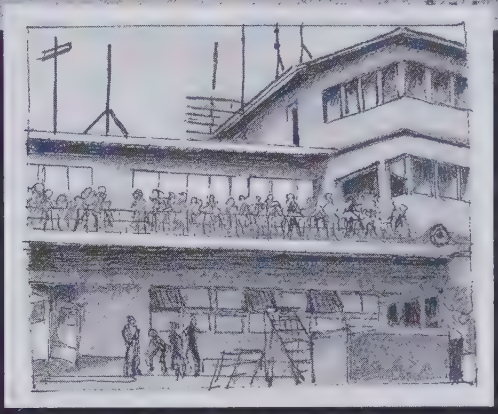
THEIR PRESENCE STIRS RESENTMENT IN SOME QUARTERS.

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I OBSERVE. I USED TO THINK OF RACISM AS A SPECIALTY OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH. HOW WRONG I WAS.



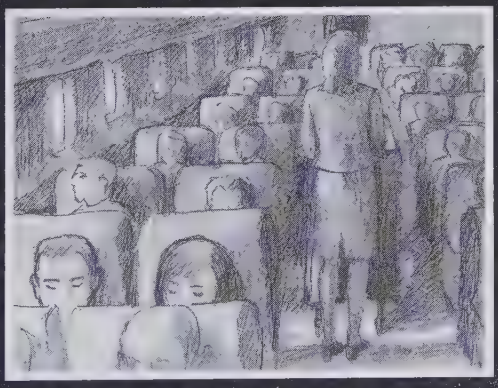

IT'S STILL THE WEE HOURS WHEN BEN WAKES UP AND PEEKS OUT THE WINDOW.
LOOK!
A FIERY RED EDGES THE HORIZON
THE SILHOUETTED WING REMINDS ME OF A BLADE PEELING BACK THE YEARS.

MY LAST GLIMPSE OF ARGENTINA RUSHES BACK TO MEMORY.

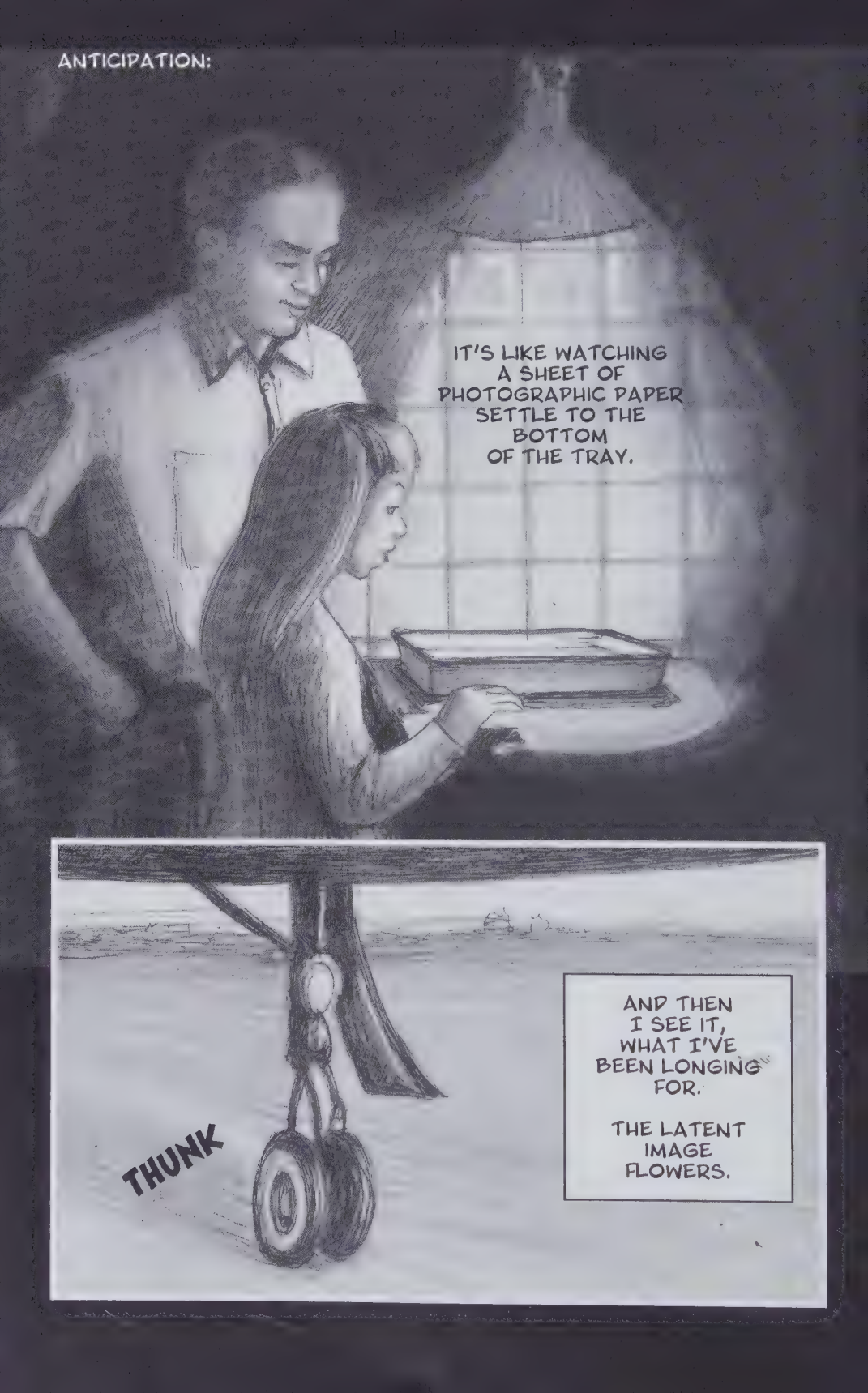


SOON, THOSE TINY PEOPLE, GRAINY AND OUT OF FOCUS, WILL BE MADE REAL AGAIN.

AS THE SOFT LIGHT OF DAWN ENTERS THE CABIN, THE BREAKFAST CARTS ROLL OUT.



WE ARE DESCENDING, AND WILL SOON PASS THROUGH THE CLOUD COVER. ONLY THEN WILL ARGENTINA COME INTO VIEW.


ANTICIPATION:
IT'S LIKE WATCHING A SHEET OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PAPER SETTLE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE TRAY.
THUNK
AND THEN I SEE IT, WHAT I'VE BEEN LONGING FOR.
THE LATENT IMAGE FLOWERS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book began in 2007 as the senior project I submitted for the completion of my undergraduate work at The University of Alabama External Degree Program. That program has since been renamed New College LifeTrack. It exists to help late bloomers like me complete our college educations. My advisor at External Degree, Sandra Perkins, never steered me wrong, and if she hadn't urged me to show my project to Dr. James C. Hall, there would be no book. I want to also thank faculty member Ric Dice for overseeing my project in its academic phase and for supporting my writing interests ever since.

Dr. Hall, the director of New College, is the key that opened the publishing door. I owe him immense gratitude. He is the first person that looked at my work and recognized its book potential. He arranged for New College to host an exhibit based on the project and made sure that acquisition editors at The University of Alabama Press knew about it.

At The University of Alabama, two professors stirred my passion for the study of American culture, which underlies this book. They are Dr. James Salem of American studies and Dr. Dabney Gray at the External Degree Program. Their courses on the American fifties and the film and literature of the Vietnam War, respectively, inspired me to take a closer look at the current events of my childhood. I began to ask myself: What about the violence that took place in my hometown? What role did it play in the larger unfolding of civil rights?

I'm also grateful to Jim Hilgartner, who opened my eyes to intriguing possibilities through the creative-writing class he taught in Tuscaloosa. The writing group that grew from his class has become a second family. I thank Roger and Sherry Myers for years of hospitality and enthusiastic reception of my creative efforts. The group that met in

their home for so long includes lifelong friends Mary Ann Shirley, Dot Franklin, Marcia Lehman, Carolyn Watson, and Joanna Hutt. I am profoundly richer for the love and support of these women. I especially thank Joanna for mentoring and cheering me through the anxious territory of preparing drafts and meeting professional expectations, and for coaching me through times of self-doubt. Those seven rules to work by remain tacked to my office wall.

The stories in this book are based primarily on personal and family memory. But to flesh out the events related in chapters 8 and 9, I needed more. I turned to the voluminous history of the civil rights movement. Many books, articles, and films lent dimension to my words and images. Of these, I want to specifically acknowledge three works. A document known as the "Alabama Literacy Test" is widely published on the Internet and difficult to attribute to its original source; nevertheless, I relied on it for an authentic representation of what black voter applicants experienced. My depiction of Marion's night march owes much to the eyewitness accounts recorded in Howell Raines's *My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South.* And until I discovered *When the Church Bell Rang Racist: The Methodist Church and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama,* by Donald E. Collins, I had but a flimsy recollection of Rev. Joe Neal Blair's tenure in Marion.

Surely The University of Alabama Press never before dealt with so accidental an author. I am grateful for the support of its entire editorial and production staff, many of whom labored in the interest of this book without my specific knowledge. From receptionist to interns, the friendliness and assurance that I encountered at every visit to the press followed me back to my home desk.

At the press, I thank Crissie E. Johnson for her bilingual abilities as editor; Rebecca Todd Minder for her vigorous efforts in promotion; Rick Cook for his expertise; Beth Motherwell for her encouragement; and Michele Myatt Quinn who prepared the manuscript for the printer and also guided me through the daunting world of Adobe Creative Suite. I thank her for this and for never saying, "what a dumb question."

I owe special gratitude to my editor, Dan Waterman. When I arrived at his office, I had only the germ of a book and scant knowledge about how to grow one. Over three-and-a-half years, he directed me through tedious manuscript development and did so with extraordinary patience, honesty, humor, respect, and vision. I can never thank him enough.

Several volunteer readers contributed their insights toward late-draft improvements. One of these is Amanda Gayle Moore, whose literary discernment is topnotch and who has become like an extra daughter to Paul and me. Carol Lynn Robertson and Victoria Robertson tested the clarity of the narrative and made astute observations, all while on family vacation. Thank you!

I thank the Reverend Dr. Catherine Collier for her interest in my work and for helping me confront the spiritual questions that memoir writing often raises.

For their friendship and enthusiastic support of my writing, I warmly thank Christo-

pher D. L. Johnson, Gary and Patricia Falls, Stephen Royce Mills, Jeff Beans, and the Reverend Hoyt Winslett.

Many people that played no specific role in the development of this book have also contributed to my creative life. Space prohibits me from naming them all. I want to make special mention of Dorothy Davis Hollingsworth, my childhood friend from Marion with whom I share a deep bond and who remembers many of the incidents told in these pages, and Candace Weaver, who happens to be my sister-in-law but is also the best friend a person could ever ask for.

I thank my dear cousin Susana Bazzini, her late husband Roberto Gavarini, and their children for reintroducing me to Argentina in exquisite fashion. It's also been my joy to rediscover other lost family members in Buenos Aires: my cousins Annie and Irene Salnicov, Adriana and Edgardo Bazzini, their respective families, and my aunt Esther Maisonnave. Additional extended family members are scattered across the Americas. We've also established new levels of connection. They are my cousin Sergio Salnicov in Uruguay and my aunt Emilia Maisonnave and her children and grandchildren in Costa Rica and the United States. The once broken circle is now redrawn.

Paul is the most supportive husband imaginable. He is equal parts coach and arts patron. The more hours I put into my work, the crazier life got, yet he never complained. I owe everything to his encouragement and unflappable nature.

For our children, Jude, Benjamin and Caitlin, this book is a glimpse into family history. But these stories are hardly static. The Quintero DNA of artistic skill, foreign-language acquisition, and passion for Argentine culture lives on through them in unique incarnations that would've delighted their grandparents as surely as they delight me.

My siblings, Virginia Nettles, Lisa Quintero Prewitt, and John Quintero, have been remarkably gracious throughout this venture. I thank them for their gift of trust. They each supplied stories and details I barely knew or had forgotten. They allowed me to tell our shared history without interference. Such generosity is hardly automatic in sibling contracts and only makes me love them more. My brother-in-law Bill Nettles deserves special mention in this context. When he married Ginny in 1964, he became a big brother to the rest of us and, ultimately, the patriarch of our tribe.

My siblings and I had extraordinary parents and a remarkable upbringing. We can never know what our lives would've been like had our parents not immigrated to the United States or made similarly consequential choices of faith, education, and personal growth. Furthermore, my parents' belief in me is a priceless gift beyond the scope of words. This book is an ode that only hints at the deeper levels of their contribution. I only wish they were alive to see it, hold it, and experience the ever-fuller esteem that I hold them in.

I have one more set of people to thank. They are the heroes of the civil rights struggle that changed my hometown. I especially honor the memory of Jimmie Lee Jackson, who gave his utmost. I pay tribute to the countless local heroes who marched for the

vote, endured jail time, and received physical blows, all without assurance that their efforts would ever pay off. I don't know how they withstood the hardships, but I thank them for their exemplary courage. And in those days, few white people dared to voice support of the cause. Of these, the late Reverend Joe Neal Blair shines like a beacon in the dark. I aspire to be mo

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Weaver, Lila Quintero.

Darkroom

Lila Quintero Weaver received her BA from New College at The University of Alabama. She and her husband, Paul, live in Northport, Alabama. *Darkroom* is her first book.

Cover illustrations by the author

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"From the moment I began *Darkroom*, I felt enveloped and embraced by its drama, tenderness, wit, and wonderful art. It is a visually powerful work whose narrative flow carried me along effortlessly."

—Howard Cruse, author of *Stuck Rubber Baby*

"*Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White* is remarkable for its truth-telling about two important issues concerning Alabama's past and present: the civil rights movement and immigration. These stories, rendered through the words and eyes of a young Latina girl who came from Argentina to Marion, Alabama, are made vivid and immediate through Weaver's highly accessible drawings and dialogue. This is a book—about maturation, family, education, and social change—every schoolchild, parent, and citizen should experience."

—Sena Jeter Naslund, author of *Ahab's Wife*, *Four Spirits*, and *Adam & Eve*

"A truly incredible look at the civil rights movement. *Darkroom* offers a double view of that movement. A gem."

—Nikki Giovanni, author of *Gemini* and *On My Journey Now*

"Lila Quintero Weaver's *Darkroom* is an impressive debut work. A memoir in the vein of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Howard Cruse's *Stuck Rubber Baby*, Weaver's mesmerizing tale is matched by her accomplished drawing and design skills. *Darkroom* is the story of a childhood, of a Latino immigrant family, of the struggle for justice in the Deep South. Weaver's appealing pencil renderings perfectly capture the book's themes of being caught in the middle, witness to (and participant in) one of the most turbulent periods in American history."

—Josh Neufeld, author of *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge*

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